

The extraordinary in the ordinary

FIT TO SERVE

I don't wish to offend anyone this morning, but I want to tell a story that involves whiskey! Some years ago Lisa was given a bottle of 50 year old single malt whiskey, now if you know anything about whiskey, you will know that that's a nice whiskey. She was given it by a company who wanted her to write about it – tell others that it was good value! What do you do with a 50 year old bottle of single malt whiskey? You have, it seems to me, two choices - the first is, you can put it in the cabinet and show it off! You can boast about it to your friends – hey come and look at the 50 year old single malt whiskey I was given, you can keep it, dust it, look at it and feel good that in your drinks cabinet is a fine bottle of whiskey. The second choice you have is to open the whiskey and drink it! After all that's what whiskey is made for isn't it? – To be drunk! You could invite friends around who appreciate that it's a single malt and 50 years old and share it. You could have discussions about its finer points, and most of all you could appreciate the gift – and drink the whiskey – put it to the use it was always intended for. What choice do you think we made with our 50 year old single malt whiskey? We took it to the USA one Christmas and watched our family drink it!

Friends anytime a gift is given, the receiver has one of two ways they can respond. The first is that the gift is so valuable that it cannot be put at risk – if you open it you risk it – it may not be appreciated; it may go wrong; it may be poorly used; sometimes it may even get broken, using or sharing a gift is always a risk. The second is that the gift is so valuable that it must be risked, those who understand this, understand that if the gift is never opened or shared it may never be appreciated at all. Friends there is no tragedy like the tragedy of the unopened gift. Friends we have a choice and that is the choice as to whether or not we will open and use the gifts that we have been given.

What may seem very ordinary to you, can become extraordinary when opened used and shared in the community it was always intended for. The price you pay for not opening the gift is potential. You will never be able to fulfil your God given potential if you never risk the gift, you will find it harder to grow and you will miss some of the things that the giver of the gift always intended for you to enjoy – the community will miss out too. This community – CBC – will never fulfil its redemptive potential if it stores up and leaves unopened the gifts it has been given, so friends we have a choice. Settling for the ordinary and being satisfied with that or taking the risk and making the extraordinary in the ordinary possible.

Friends, I want to be part of a church where we see the extraordinary in the ordinary, I want to be part of a church where the gifts don't sit unopened, but where everyone is stepping out – taking the risk. Where leaders are released into leading in their areas of gifting, where they have a 'whatever it takes attitude' to leading diligently. Where small groups are strong and

vibrant because people have taken the risk and are committed to leading and attending them. Where teams are full of people who say – I'll give whatever I can to see this team reach its potential. Where there is compassion for others because those who are good at being with others are released into being there, a community that has a heart for prayer because those who are especially called to pray– do so. Where those who have the wisdom of years help those of us who don't, because you see how important it is to help us! I want to be part of a church that can reach its full redemptive potential because people here would rather take the risk and step out.

I do not want to contemplate the alternative, a church that is always struggling to find leaders who will commit, a church where small groups struggle because no-one will serve them, a church where people are lonely, others suffering, some are uncared for. A church where children are a nuisance and an inconvenience. A church that is inward looking because it takes all its energy just to survive. There is no tragedy like the tragedy of the unopened gift. This is the tragedy of the unopened gift: It's as if I've lived half my life waiting for life to begin, thinking it's somewhere off in the future.

Mathew 25 v 14-15 The Parable of the Talents

Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

How many servants got nothing? The Lord of the Gift gives gifts to everyone, nobody gets nothing. How many of us need to hear that today, the Lord of the Gift has given you gifts, talents and abilities, for some of us here this requires us to stop and change the way we think about ourselves. God has given gifts to us – yes he has! He is the Lord of the Gift and he has given something to everyone. A talent was equivalent of about 15 years wages, that is by any reckoning a huge sum of money, the point Jesus seems to be driving home here is this – this is a great opportunity for these three servants - they have been entrusted with a remarkable gift. But it is a different gift to each. The Lord of the Gift has entrusted them with his treasure and he has given them the chance of a lifetime, this is an opportunity for them to take a risk.

You know the truth of this – the Lord of the Gift has given treasure to you and me, he gives to all not to some, there is no such thing as a no talent person, not only that, but the Lord of the gift himself offers to partner with us as we use what he gives us. We are all equipped and expected to contribute because the Master gives the gift. Friends here's the challenge, I may like my gift, or I may not, I may torture myself by desiring or seeking what has been given to someone else but it is the Lord of the Gift who gives, you don't decide your own gifts. We get our word talent from this very story; mind, abilities, spiritual gifts, body, money, will. The question is; will I come to prize and appreciate what the Lord of the Gift has given to me.

Mathew 25 v 16-18

The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

At once here does not mean so much 'immediately' it means rather that he grasped the reality of what had been given to him, he realises that he will never have a better opportunity as long as he lives to seize a chance like this. The implication is friends, that if you grasp what God has given to you, you will be like this man, you will not be sidetracked but you will put the gift to good use.

Mathew 25 v 19-30

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master' he said 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' The master replied 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Master's happiness!' The man with the two talents also came 'Master' he said 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' His Master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put in charge of many things. Come and share your Master's happiness!' Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' His Master replied 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who had ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The third servant forgot something very important the Lord of the Gift is coming back! How do you live? He is the Lord of the Settled Account too, and one day he will ask us the question – what did you do with what I gave you? Perhaps we tend to forget that he is the Lord of the Settled Account, many of us blame our refusal to open the gift on circumstances or external pressures; when things change then I'll be able to serve, and we become very good at being able to rationalise burying our gifts. Why is it that it is the servant given only one talent who buries it? Maybe Jesus is trying to make an important point. This story seems to teach that how much you get is not in fact the most important or significant thing, it's simply true to life – some have more than others, some people are more obviously gifted than others – that's a fact of life. The Master treats each of the servants in the same way – regardless of how much they were given, the point is – I must ruthlessly refuse to compare my talents with anyone else. The Lord of the Settled Account will not ask you to account for what he gave to someone else. Comparing myself to others can lead to pride – if I think I'm better; misery if I think I'm worse, or worst of all – it may lead me to bury my treasure – the irreplaceable treasure that God has given only to me!

The Lord of the Gift is very wise and he knows exactly what he's doing when he gives out his treasure and one day he will ask you – so what did you do with what I gave you – only you? You know the hardest part of the story is, maybe? It is that the third servant wasn't punished for doing bad things – he didn't steal or embezzle, the tragedy is he is punished for doing nothing! He was lazy! Friends, perhaps the challenge to us is our level of comfort. Friends will we reach our redemptive potential, or will we invest in making ourselves more comfortable while the world around us literally goes to hell? The Lord of the Gift, the Lord of the Settled Account, is also the Lord of the Reward. He has wonderful things in store for those who steward his treasure wisely. The best words anyone can hear must be – 'Well done good and faithful servant enter the joy of the Lord.' Did you know, though, heaven is not a place of rest! Mathew 25 v 21 + 23; I will put you in charge of many things. No, heaven is the place of realised potential, heaven is the place we will finally experience the fullness of adventure, creativity and fruitfulness we were made for. So, friends, fit to serve? Let's take the risk, treasure the gifts and look forward to hearing him say 'Well done good and faithful servants – enter the joy of the Lord!