

*A sermon preached by Emma Hodge
on Sunday 15th November 2020, 2nd Sunday before Advent
at St. Michael & All Angels, Church, Sandhurst*

May the words of my lips and the thoughts and meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight O lord our strength and our redeemer; Amen

This time of year many of us are busy preparing for Christmas, even though for many of us Christmas may be different this year, however preparations still need to be made.

Preparations take many different forms and they all have different steps and stages, for example, one of my Christmas preparations will involve sultanas, raisins, barley wine, currants, mixed peel, to name but a few and gathering them together will be one of my steps in preparation.

But whatever steps and stages there are in our preparations, they all have one aim. The result. The result of all these ingredients will be a Christmas pudding!

Our New Testament reading from the first letter to the Thessalonians also has preparation in mind, but instead of preparing to make a Christmas pudding, it is about preparing for Jesus' second coming.

St. Paul wrote this letter probably just a few months after he had visited Thessalonica and in the passage we heard today, he is instructing those who read and hear the letter to be prepared. St Paul reminds us that we are "children of light" and in case you are wondering; that light is Jesus and he also encourages us to be awake.

The sleep that Paul refers to is not the necessary restful sleep which is vital for our physical and mental well being, but instead it is about our **attitude**; we should not sleepwalk through life but instead live it with a purpose, to be committed to our Christian faith and put it into action every day in all aspects of our lives. St Paul uses the imagery of armour to describe how we should live our life, he tells us to put on the breastplate of faith and love, which are the foundations of living a Christian life. Only when our faith and love are part of who we are, will our light shine out and be visible to others.

The passage that we heard today is the second half of a passage that refers to the second coming of Jesus which begins at chapter 4 verse 13. Today, our passage reminds us that we do not know the time when Jesus will come again, this is because it is God's timing that is important. God's time is also picked up on our psalm when we are told that a thousand years are like a day to God.

Jesus's message that he will come again is true, but as we are told we don't know the day or the time. That is for God to know, but we can expect Jesus to come when we are least expecting it – “like a thief in the night”.

The New Testament reading focussed on preparing for Jesus second coming and our Gospel reading is also about Jesus second coming. The gospel reading is sometimes known as the parable of the talents and it comes in the middle of three parables about being prepared for Jesus second coming.

When we use the word “talent”, nowadays we tend to use it in the context referring to someone's skill or hobby such as “Jane is a talented organist” (which she is) but this is not the only meaning of the word talents in the bible. In biblical times, a talent was also a measure of weight, and in Jesus time it referred to a weight of money, the amount of money in one talent was large, the equivalent of several years wages for a labourer.

The parable features three servants and a master. Each of the servants was entrusted with a very large sum of money. Masters trusting servants with property and money was common in Jesus time, so this is not unusual.

The master entrusted his servants with one talent, two talents and five talents respectively, all very large sums of money, but the amount of money is not the point of the parable, instead it is about the **attitude and actions** of the servants.

One of the servants took the money and buried it. Now I don't know about you, but if I had been given a very large sum of money, burying it in the ground is not what I would have chosen to do with the money, especially if I didn't know when the master was returning.

The servant who buried the money, didn't use it, he received the talent, and instead of doing something with it, he buried it, and when asked why, he explained that he was afraid of his master.

The other two servants, were given different amounts according to their gifts but how they used them were the same. These two servants took the gift of the large amount of money and **did** something with them. We are told that the result of the servants actions was that the talents were doubled.

The difference between these two servants and the servant who received one talent is clear. They were proactive. They all received the gift but only two of them did something with the talent.

The master rewards the servants who did something with the money but threw out the servant who did nothing.

The servant who buried the talent was treated harshly, thrown into the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, which we can interpret as a description of hell.

The servants who did something with the talents were rewarded, the phrase "with abundance" is used as their rewards, which is an interpretation for heaven.

The master is Jesus. When Jesus told this parable it was towards the end of his earthly life and that he knew that he would be leaving his disciples soon and one day would return. Throughout the gospels Jesus gives his disciples tasks to do, with from being an example or light in the world (Matthew 5:16) to making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19)

The servants are us.

We know Jesus many of us have promised to serve him to the end as our master and our friend.

Each one of us has accepted the talents that Jesus has given us, the talents are not just money but everything in our lives,

What do we do with our lives, do we use our lives to live out our Christian faith in words and actions?

As Christians, we should be prepared for Jesus second coming and be ready to meet Jesus when he returns in glory.

I started this sermon with listing some of the ingredients for a Christmas pudding, but this wasn't the first step, the first step was to check the ingredient list, and to see what ingredients I already had in.

What steps do you need to do to prepare to meet Jesus?

Take a moment and imagine that Jesus has returned today and that he is standing in front of you.

You are asked to give an account of how you have used your life

*What would Jesus say to you, would he say
"You wicked and lazy person"
Or would he say
"Well done, good and faithful servant"?*

Which would you like him to say to you?

If you would know that Jesus would come again next month, what steps would you take to prepare to meet him?