

# Worship - Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2020

## The Radical Challenge

Opening music: Lord, whose love in humble service

Good morning everyone, and welcome to today's worship with the churches of Fleet URC and Beacon Hill URC. I will be leading us in prayer today. We are joined by the Reverend John Whitton, who often leads worship at BHURC. It is always a pleasure to hear John preach, and he will be bringing us his reflection on the Gospel this morning. Now let us take a moment to prepare for worship.

### Prayer of preparation for worship

Kind and ever - loving God,  
Giver of Life and all that is good,  
You have trusted us with so much: your creation, your peace, and your promise.  
Give us the grace to see your goodness unfold in the world around us, right here in the land of the living.  
Let us be united in love and seek you with our whole hearts as we come today to worship you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Silence*

### Call to worship

God is the Creator of the Heavens and Earth;  
**God has made everything, and given it to us.**  
Jesus is our Redeemer, our Saviour, our Friend;  
**Jesus has come to show us God's love, and teaches us to love one another.**  
The Holy Spirit moves in us, brings us together, and guides us in life;  
**The Spirit reminds us that everything comes from God.**  
Let us share in all of the good gifts of God:  
**Let us worship our God together as one.**

## Prayers of Thanksgiving and confession

We give you all thanks and praise, O God.  
God of all blessings, source of all life, giver of all grace:

We thank you for the gift of life:  
for the breath that sustains life,  
for the food of this earth that nurtures life,  
for the love of family and friends  
without which there would be no life.

We thank you for the mystery of creation:  
for the beauty that the eye can see,  
for the joy that the ear may hear,  
for the unknown that we cannot behold filling the universe with wonder,  
for the expanse of space that draws us beyond the definitions of our selves.

We thank you for setting us in communities:  
for families who nurture our becoming,  
for friends who love us by choice,  
for companions at work, who share our burdens and daily tasks,  
for strangers who welcome us into their midst,  
for people from other lands who call us to grow in understanding,  
for children who lighten our moments with delight,  
for the unborn, who offer us hope for the future.

We thank you for this day:  
for life and one more day to love,  
for opportunity and one more day to work for justice and peace,  
for neighbours and one more person to love and by whom be loved,  
for your grace and one more experience of your presence,  
for your promise: to be with us, to be our God, and to give salvation.

For these, and all blessings,  
we give you thanks, eternal, loving God, through Jesus Christ we  
pray. Amen.

Vienna Cobb Anderson <https://www.beliefnet.com/prayers/christian/gratitude/prayer-of-thanksgiving.aspx>

Loving God, you have given us so much.

You have lavished gifts on us:

In family and friends, in fellow members of the Church & in our  
neighbours far and wide.

And you have given each one of us talents or graces to share,  
Which, when we use them, enrich other people's lives as well as  
our own.

Above all you have given us love to share,

Through compassion, gentleness and mutual support.

Forgive us when self - interest or indifference make us careless or  
faithless servants.

Do not cast us out as worthless, but challenge us and renew us:

Make us light for the world. Amen

Alan Gaunt Light for the World URC Prayer Handbook 2011

### Words of Assurance

Hear the Good News:

We have not been faithful in all things.

But our God still welcomes us with patience and kindness.

Therefore, as people of God's promise,

let us receive forgiveness, embrace hope, and faithfully respond,  
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**Glory to God!**

**We are forgiven.**

**We have hope.**

**We will respond. Amen.**

### Readings

#### 1 Thessalonians 5: 1 – 11 read by Moira Bamfield from Fleet URC

**1** But as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you. **2** For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. **3** When people say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape. **4** But you are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief. **5** For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.

**6** So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. **7** For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. **8** But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. **9** For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, **10** who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him. **11** Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

#### Matthew 25: 14 - 30 read by Pam Hudson from Fleet URC

**14** "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. **15** To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

**16** The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. **17** So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. **18** But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

**19** "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. **20** The man who had received five

bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.' 21 "His 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!'

22 "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.' 23 "His 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!'

24 "Then the man who had received one bag of gold 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. 25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' 26 "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? 27 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. 28 " 'So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. 29 For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

## Reflection

## Reverend John Whitton

Our Bible reading this morning is the very well-known tale, 'The Parable of the Talents'. It's vivid and compelling and, to my amusement, has been interpreted, over the years, in some bizarre ways. Sermons can often tell you a lot about the contemporary society and its beliefs and problems.

As a churchgoer, I was aware that many ministers in Glasgow were influenced by Socialism. Wags would

describe them as preaching a 'red-hot social gospel'. They disparaged the rich and championed the poor. Take, for example, one preacher talking about the parable of the talents. He said this, "The third servant, the one who buries his talent and gets into trouble, is the one we should admire. We should admire him for being careful and prudent. He's a good man. He shies away from the cut and thrust, capitalistic attitudes of his master."

However attractive to some a red-hot social gospel may be, you cannot read it into this parable. This parable is all about the kingdom of God, which Jesus came to proclaim. Jesus expects Christians to engage in urgent action, to work for the kingdom, not to sit around doing nothing. For, like it or not, Jesus sees the third servant as the villain of the piece and the sharp, uncompromising businessman, so feared by the third servant, is seen by Jesus as being entirely justified in his demands.

How many times, when we read the Bible, are we shocked by what Jesus says in the parables? What Jesus wants is to kick us out of our comfort zones. He doesn't want us to tiptoe through the tulips of an idle church life.

Christianity is a radical challenge. Jesus invites us to see God not as an indulgent uncle who'll do whatever we ask, who'll affirm us all the time and never challenge us; He wants us to get our sleeves rolled up and start working for the kingdom. Christian living is dynamic living (or it should be!).

A common complaint from ministers and elders is that people just don't want to get too involved in church work. Like the third servant, they prefer to toddle along, far from the madding crowd. They're looking for the quiet life.

Some years ago, there was a fashion in many churches to have a frieze hanging on the entrance hall or the coffee room. On the frieze would be the photographs and the names of every member. The frieze would be entitled 'Our Church Family'. It is right that a Christian fellowship should be committed to one another but there's a danger with this. Families can be inward-looking and exclusive.

The Kingdom of God extends beyond the four walls of our church. In this parable, Jesus is reminding us that we are called urgently to mission. In our world today, there is entrenched injustice and spiritual hunger that cries out to heaven. Where are we in all this and where is our church? Too often the good news we are called to proclaim is buried in the ground.

In Jesus, the kingdom of God came with mighty power. He calls us to throw ourselves into its work. In today's parable there is a warning for all of us, as individual Christians; don't rest on your laurels; don't keep everything just as we like it; rather, get stuck in with the talents you've been given. God does not want stick in the muds. The peril of the one talent man is to sit back and do nothing but even one talent and the spirit of God can go a long way. It's not what you do that counts but the love that you put into the doing.

May I close with a story which profoundly influenced me when I first read it forty-seven years ago? A distinguished clergyman from the World Council of Churches, C T Itty, was visiting an ashram near Delhi. Towards the end of his visit, he asked to go to the church so that he could pray with his hosts before he departed. They took him to a tree in an open grassland area. From the tree hung a plain wooden cross on a thin piece of wire. To his shock Itty realised there were no walls on the church. From where he stood, under the cross,

he could see and smell the slums of the poor, women hanging out washing, children playing in the street, animals wandering where they chose. He was horrified.

He said, "How can I pray in a place like this?" One of his hosts smiled and replied, "Here we pray with our eyes open. How can we effectively pray for the people we serve without looking out and seeing the rugged reality of life? This is the only way we can bring them before God's mercy."

Let's never, ever, make the mistake of misunderstanding just how no-nonsense our God is about our mission as Christians. Burying our talent is not an option; neither is the quiet life. Yes, I know that the road which Jesus bids us walk is steep, rocky and uphill but we don't walk that road alone, we walk in the power of God's Spirit. Remember the blessing in His last words before He returned to His father, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of time."

### **Responding to the parable of the servants**

Lord, I have read your story

And I can see myself in each of the three servants.  
Sometimes I've been given a great deal,  
Sometimes, less so, and sometimes, if I'm honest,  
Your provision has felt much less than I'd hoped for.

Yet all that I have and all that I am comes as a gift from you.  
In return you do not require extravagant gestures of gratitude,  
But, simply, that I use, as well and as fully as I am able,  
The gifts with which you have entrusted me.

Today, tonight and through all of my life,  
Receive back with interest your gracious gifts to me.

© Ian Fosten 'I will use what I've been given'  
Prayers from the Heart URC Prayer Handbook 2020

## Hymn: Take my life and let it be

Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;  
Take my moments and my days,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands and let them move  
At the impulse of Thy love;  
Take my feet and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing  
Always, only, for my King;  
Take my lips, and let them be  
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold;  
Not a mite would I withhold;  
Take my intellect, and use  
Every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it Thine;  
It shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart; it is Thine own;  
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
At Thy feet its treasure-store.  
Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for Thee.

Sung by the Newcastle Cathedral Virtual Choir Project by permission

<https://newcastlecathedral.org.uk/virtual-church-choir/>

## Prayers of intercession

Let us pray.

Lord God - we give you thanks for all your gifts to us – for daily food - for health - for each breath we take - for freedom to choose - and for the gifts of your word, your power, and your love. Our hearts are truly overwhelmed, O God, when we consider all that you are and how you have entrusted so much to us. May we be worthy of that trust - may we be a people who are unafraid to live as fully and as richly as you want us to live.

### Lord hear our prayer

Help us O God, as followers of Jesus, to multiply all that you given us, to risk spreading your word and perhaps see it misunderstood, to gamble by loving those whom others think worthy only of hate, to take chances by doing good to those who have not done good to us. Help us be faith filled and to desire to increase your glory and your goodness in this world. Make us ones who share in both word and deed that which you have given to us.

### Lord hear our prayer

We pray, O God, for the church here today - that it may encourage all its members to discover, develop, and use all their gifts, those of nature and those of grace.

### Lord hear our prayer

We pray for those who are poor in body or in spirit... for those who are oppressed and heavy laden.... for those who are sick or in despair. We particularly remember.....

Minister O God by your Spirit, and by us, to all those for whom we have prayed - and help us walk faithfully in the path of our Lord Jesus Christ –

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he who taught us to pray together as one family, saying

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done,  
in earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those that trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.

### Closing prayer

When we meet you, Christ of many disguises, give us grace to respond to your need, not because we have seen you or recognised you, but simply because the need is there and you have called us to do what we can.

So replenish the oils of kindness within us,  
Give us courage to risk ourselves for others  
And lighten our lives with your unexpected presence.

Adapted from Terry Hinks 'Praying the Way'

### Blessing led by Reverend John Whitton

May the blessing of the eternal God be upon us and upon our work and worship together, His light to guide us, His presence to strengthen us, His love to unite us, now and always. Amen.

Closing music: We give thee but thine own

Opening & closing music from <https://www.smallchurchmusic.com/>

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