

Homily – 15-11-20 – Pentecost 24 - Bishop Cam Venables

Readings: Judges 4:1-10; Psalm 123; Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

In January this year the Diocesan Reconciliation Co-ordinator, Aunty Sandra King, was awarded an Order of Australia Medal which was fantastic. Sandra had not been working with the Diocese for very long and her award gave all of us an opportunity to learn something of the journey she had travelled and the positive difference she had made over many years in the lives of hundreds of young women.

Sandra is a Quandamooka (Stradbroke Island) and Bundjalung (Tweed Heads) woman who is best known for being a trailblazing Aboriginal model. In the midst of a successful career Sandra started her own management company and through this is remembered as a role model, mentor, motivational speaker, and event organiser who encouraged and empowered many young lives, particularly those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Sandra's current role with the Anglican Church involves educating clergy, staff, and parishioners across the Diocese about cultural and historic issues, challenging people's perceptions of First Nations Australia and broadening the understanding of where we are today and how we can move forward together.

In an Anglican FOCUS March Sandra named a verse from Joshua as a favourite which says, *'Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go'* (Joshua 1:9). Later, in that same interview, Sandra said that the best piece of advice she'd ever received was from her parents who told her to *'make the most of what you have, not to give up, not to judge others in the way you have been judged, and that no matter how you dress or what you do, you will always be black!'*

I thought of Aunty Sandra when I reflected on today's Gospel reading because she has clearly used her gifts and abilities to bless the lives of many and continues to do so in her current role. Please join with me in praying for Sandra and this ongoing work of reconciliation, and consider how Sandra could assist you in this work with local church and community.

When I related Sandra's abilities to the parable I probably fall into the common trap of mistranslating the Greek word *'talanton'* into the English word 'talent'. But, a *talanton* was a commercial weight of silver equivalent to thirty four kilograms so the English word talent is misleading! To go deeper and get a sense of monetary value, one *'talanton'* at the time of Jesus was the amount paid to a labourer for fifteen years of work! With this in mind the challenge of the parable becomes clearer for Jesus suggested that a very wealthy man gave significant wealth to three of his servants before he went on a long journey. To the first he gave the equivalent of seventy five years wages (five talents), to the second - thirty years wages (two talents), and to the third - fifteen years wages (one talent).

If we were to extrapolate, and for the sake of illustration agree that a labourer's annual wage in Australia is \$50,000, then the story can be re-framed using currency we are familiar with. The parable would now say that a wealthy man gave three million, seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars to the first of his servants; one and half million to the second; and three quarters of a million to the third! In each case the wealthy man was generous, but this was not immediately apparent when we first read or hear the English word talent!

To continue using Australian currency: the first and second servants used their money and doubled the amounts that had been given. So, the first was able to say, 'I now have seven and a half million dollars!' The second, 'I now have three million dollars!' And the third, 'Look, I didn't do anything with it – I just buried it in the ground – so, here it is unchanged!'

The subsequent affirmation of the first two servants in the parable seems, at least superficially, to endorse Capitalism! Don't lock your money away, but use it to invest and make more money. Don't you're your money in a mattress or bury it in the ground: use it or lose it!

However, there are more layer to this parable to consider. If we agree that the wealthy man in the parable alludes to God then the parable affirms God to be extraordinarily generous, because even the third servant was given responsibility for an amount equivalent to fifteen years wages. It's also important to bear in mind that what was entrusted to the servants still belonged to the God, and that at some stage they were held accountable for the way these things had been used.

So, what are some of the things we believe that God has gifted and entrusted to us? When we answer this question I think we'll recognise that the parable is not about money at all!

Let me suggest some things that we could all potentially agree with. We might begin with the gift of our lives, and the physical and intellectual abilities we have: are we being good stewards of these? Are we looking after our health, and exercising our abilities to be a blessing in the life of others? We might continue with the gift of those we share life with – particularly family and friends: are we being good stewards of these? We might recognise easily how those relationships are a blessing in our own lives, but in what ways are we a blessing in theirs?

Then there is the gift of faith in Christ. Are we being good stewards of this... or do we bury it in the ground, and hide it? Do we explore, develop, and share our faith, in ways that cause it to become an integral part of who we are, or is it something we draw from only in times of trouble? The admonition of the wealthy man to the third servant was that he had been self-interested and lazy... and I uncomfortably know that I am often both of these.

In the conclusion of his inauguration speech as the 35th US President, John Kennedy, offered this thoughtful challenge, '*...my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.*' Which he followed immediately with, '*My fellow citizens of the world, ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom man.*'

Remarkable how these words, articulated fifty nine years ago, continue to speak uncomfortable truth.

I think very often in our life and faith journey we can ask what God can do for us, rather than what we can do for God and today's parable uncomfortably challenges this self-centred way of thinking and being.

'What can we do for God?' – with our little life and abilities seems like a worthy question in response. And 'What would God have us do and give priority to?' - as individuals, as families, as communities of faith, and as a society. What would God have us do and give priority to in response to the challenges we face locally, nationally and internationally?

Worth considering and taking into prayer – please join with me now:

Gracious God, we give thanks for the great gift of our lives, the little gift of our abilities, and the extraordinary gift of your love. Through your Spirit please help to use wisely what you have given to us, so that in some small way we may each contribute to the work of making the world a better place. We pray in the name of one who said, 'Not my will but yours!' Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.