

The Parish of Bardsey with East Keswick

Sermon

Sunday 19 November 2023: Angela Hannafin

Good morning and welcome to Sunday's Sofa Sermon. We're approaching Advent in two weeks' time, which is reflected in today's reading from Matthew.

¹⁴ "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. ¹⁵ He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip.

¹⁶ "The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. ¹⁷ The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. ¹⁸ But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master's money.

¹⁹ "After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. ²⁰ The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver came forward with five more and said, 'Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest, and I have earned five more.' ²¹ "The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'

²² "The servant who had received the two bags of silver came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two bags of silver to invest, and I have earned two more.'

²³ "The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'

²⁴ "Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, 'Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. ²⁵ I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.'

²⁶ "But the master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn't plant and gathered crops I didn't cultivate, ²⁷ why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.'

²⁸ "Then he ordered, 'Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver. ²⁹ To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do

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nothing, even what little they have will be taken away. ³⁰ Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The readings for this time of year always focus on the imminent return of Jesus. We remember the second coming of Jesus before we prepare ourselves for his great first arrival at Christmas. It's good to be reminded that the Master will return one day as King and although we don't know when that will be, we're not idle as we wait. He's given us a job to do living our lives so that others can be signposted to God through what they see in us. We will all be accountable to God for how we live our lives and what we do to advance the Kingdom of Heaven. But we're also accountable to God for those gifts and skills that he has given us to make this happen. We may not see ourselves as terribly talented, and we may envy the skills of other people, but envy is always a trick of the enemy to stop us seeing ourselves with value and only looking at others as an example of what we want. God sees differently. Through the Holy Spirit, every single one of us has gifts and skills which can be used for God's glory. Jesus told this parable to warn his disciples of not using their skills. All three servants were told to look after their assets but not all of them did something. Instead, one chose inaction, prompted by fear. The servant who hid the silver could have put it in the bank, but instead he did very little. Jesus tells of faithfulness being attributed to those who did something with what they were given. The servant who hid the silver also made a judgement on the master, saying that he was a harsh man and that the crops he made weren't planted by him. In other words, he hadn't worked hard for them. Whilst the other servants got on with trying to make investments, the lazy servant had made an assumption and did nothing.

This is not really about money, but about the courage to do something with your life and the determination to be faithful to do it because you can see a bigger picture. Over the past few days I've been at the General Synod in London. The Synod is the legislative body of the Church of England and the agenda was dominated by the discussion on same sex issues. The Church of England doctrine is currently unchanged on its position about marriage, in other words it states that marriage can only be recognised between a man and a woman. However, there has been a gradual change over the past few years, with Bishops finally realising that there has been no provision for LGBTQIA+ Christians and that the church's track record with same sex people has been very damaging. Our own Bishop Nick has always encouraged those of us who are elected on General Synod to get stuck into it through engagement in debates. Speaking at Synod is quite a daunting thing. In order to do well, you need to say something short, clear, well-structured and different in the few minutes allocated to you, and be

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ready to change your speech if the person in front of you says what you were about to say. I chose this Synod to spend my time listening to others, and to supporting those same sex people who chose to make their own story known so bravely. I don't think I have particular skills in debating, although I have made one General Synod speech so far, but can use my relational skills to encourage, support and listen to those who were struggling in a space with diverse strong feelings. At times Synod was so difficult as it felt very tribal, with some of the speeches being brutal and unloving. Overall, though, I think there was healthy debate, people genuinely listened to each other, and tried to work out what the most loving outcome could be. I could see a bigger picture emerging. As a result of the debate, there was fruitfulness, although that depends on where you stand on the issue. As a result of an amendment that was voted through, churches will be able to opt in to a trial period of holding standalone blessings for same sex couples, should the PCC and incumbent agree. Whilst some have said it's a 'crumb' of success, and it may not feel like a huge step forward, I believe it is progress for all those in the LGBTQIA+ community who for so long have had no voice, no inclusion and no support. We here in Bardsey and East Keswick have agreed to be part of the Inclusive Church network to show our alliance on this. So whilst I felt exhausted and drained from two full days of Synod, from concentrating on complex amendments and remembering to press FOR or AGAINST on my blackberry, from sitting in a hot room drinking tea made with water that felt like it was boiled a few weeks ago, when I asked myself what was it all for, I reminded myself I used my skills to work towards a bigger picture. Those LGBTQIA + friends I have can now express their love publicly in church, with the blessing of the church (although to be honest they've always had God's blessing anyway).

We are all working towards a glorious future with Christ, when we will be with the saints forever in heaven. Maybe Christ will come back beforehand or maybe his journey away will be prolonged so that we can do something with the gifts and skills we've received from him. Whatever you do with your life, just make sure you do something. It doesn't have to be showy, complex or loud, although God often tests us by giving us difficult or costly things to do for him. Valuing a human being by listening or by showing support can be enough of a reflection of the love of God for all he has made. Don't be like the last servant who was inactive because of fear. Consider what God has entrusted to you and how you can make it grow. Because you can. **AMEN.**