
Go Forth in God's Light

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 19 November 2023

Judges 4:1-7 • 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 • Matthew 25:14-30



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

We often speak of the gifts of God. God gives us many things. First of all, God gives us our very lives! We only live because of this gift of life, and we only continue to live through God's sustaining power, working through the Spirit. Besides this essential gift, we are given talents and abilities, preferences, loves, skills, tendencies — all the many things that make up our personalities. Some gifts are practical, like being good at woodworking or growing crops. Others are helpful emotionally, like a calm demeanour, or a talent for listening to other people.

All the gifts we were born with, or develop or learn later, along with the original gift of life, make each one of us a unique person, loved by God and sent into the world to serve God and our fellows. What makes the difference between one person beloved by God and another are what we do with these gifts, and that's what this parable is about. Those who took the talents and did something with them, earning a return — those are the ones who do God's will. God doesn't want us just to sit on our skill and abilities. For God does not give them to us for no reason — God expects us to use our gifts wisely, the best way we can.

In the revised version of the Apostles' Creed which we use every third Sunday, we say: "Your purpose overarches everything we do." We cannot get away from the fact that God's universe is well-ordered. God is not capricious; God doesn't make it up as he goes along; all is planned. And because we are part of the plan, we also must work in with the plan. Being attuned to God's plan should be the goal of our existence. Those who are righteous, those who live fully in the faith of Christ, are those who play the part God gives them.

There is something that happens to a stage actor during the rehearsal of a play. I used to do some amateur theatre, and I remember the process of learning a part. At the start of the rehearsal period, we first gathered with the director and sat around a room or around a table and just read our parts from our scripts. The idea is to get an idea of the flow of the play: what happens, how it happens, how each character fits in. A well-written play will flow naturally from scene to scene. Some actors at this point in the process will actually try to act the part; others will read the lines in a fairly simple way, knowing that the character will evolve over the days and weeks of rehearsals.

Before any real character work can start, though, you have to memorise those lines. For some this is easy; not so much for others. For the first several rehearsals you are "on book", holding the script in your hand while you learn your entrances and exits and where to stand and sit and so forth. It's always fun starting the process and learning the part.

Little by little I would learn the script, and the forgotten bits would come fewer and farther between. And there came a time when I would know it — not just remember it, but really know it. It was there in my head and I didn't have to think about remembering any more. That's when you can really work on bringing the character alive. After that point, when performing the part, the words just sort of floated along at the top of my head, and I said them naturally, as if I had just thought of them.

I think this is not unlike building a relationship with God, particularly for someone who comes into the church later in life; but I think it's true of anyone who seeks to deepen their connection to God, which can happen at any age. We

learn over time what our “script” is — what God wants us to do with our lives. For some, it takes a long time to learn. I believe God wanted me in the church, but it took me over forty years to figure that one out. But once we know, we are like the actor who knows the script, and we can go forward confidently and play our part in God’s world.

And ultimately we don’t even need the words. I’ve found that over time, my prayers have become less about forming words in my mind or with my lips, and more about the connection to God. I “feel” the prayers, rather than pray them, if you will. It is like when I was acting and knew my lines inside and out. The words begin to disappear and the Spirit, who is always present to help us pray, takes over.

And at the risk of stretching my analogy too far, I note that our reading from Thessalonians speaks of those who follow Christ as being children of light. When experienced actors step out on stage, they always seek their light. Stage lighting is not usually uniform — there are spot lights on particular areas of the stage, where the director wants the important action to occur. “Find your light!” a director will call to an inexperienced actor. Paul says that we do not belong to the night or the darkness — we walk in the light of God’s glorious day. Light does two things: it lets us see where we are going and what we are doing, and it lets other people see it too. We who are Christians proclaim the Gospel in the light of day, where all can see our example. We do not act as Christians for show, or to draw attention to ourselves, except to the extent that we want those who don’t yet know God to get an idea that something good is here — God’s love.

So with thanks to God we take our gifts and our talents out into the world — as we say each week, we go to love and serve the Lord, and we go in peace and faith to bring to this troubled world the Gospel of life and love. Thanks be to God. Amen.