



*Are you ready to meet Jesus? Are you where you ought to be?
Will he know you when he sees you? Or will he say depart from me*

That's from one of Dylan's Christian songs based on last week's gospel reading about the 10 bridesmaids waiting for the coming of the groom. Some were ready and some were not. The point Jesus was making was that since we don't know when the End of Days is coming we must be in a state of perpetual readiness. Are you ready?

However, that parable leaves unanswered the question of, '*What is readiness?*' Therefore Jesus follows up on that story with another one about three slaves left in charge of the master's estate who have each been entrusted an amount of cash to hold on to until the master returns. Two of the slaves were sharp businessmen and by the time the master had returned had doubled the amounts they had been given.

But then there is the unfortunate slave who was so *afraid of getting it wrong* that he did nothing with his portion of the cash. Like the man at the wedding feast in the wrong clothes he is cast out of the Kingdom.

Jesus here is trying to drive home what the Kingdom of God is, and what's expected if we are going to consider ourselves part of it. In this story Jesus answers that question about what it means to be ready.

Jesus is quite clear that readiness is not about passively waiting for the End of Days. Throughout the church's history there have been misguided people standing around with their calendars and watches thinking they have sussed out God and waiting to be raptured up to heaven at a particular moment. We can laugh at their gullibility, which would be a very unkind attitude. Rather we should be sad at the waste of God-given talents and the powerful faith which they have shown, however misguidedly.

Being ready isn't getting rid of possessions and standing around waiting for something to happen. Readiness is an active condition. In some ways it's like making a will. Because one makes a will doesn't mean one expects to die momentarily. One makes a will to ready for something that one has no control over and *will* happen sooner or later.

But in another way, being ready for Jesus is *not* like making a will. Once you've made your will, that's it, you've done it and no further action is required; it is a passive readiness. Being ready for Jesus is not an empty, meaningless delay, but an opportunity to make good use of our talents.

In this parable, 'talent' represents opportunities in the Kingdom of God; noting that such opportunities differ in character and size from person to person, but they are opportunities which are meant to be put to good use. By having the master give his slaves different amounts of cash with which to work, indicates that God reckons with us as individuals, considering our differing circumstances and personalities, noting that the reward for good and faithful service isn't a cozy pension, but even greater responsibilities.

The slave in the story who failed to properly use his talents wasn't a bad person. He wasn't lazy or shiftless. But being ready is more than just not doing wrong. The failed slave's problem was that he was afraid, he was in fear of the master's wrath should he make a mistake.

Fear of getting it wrong can paralyze us; keep us locked down in a state of inactivity. The thing is, that we can't always wait until we have enough advance notice, we can't put things off until we are sure that we have all the right skills we think should have, until we've got all of our ducks in a row.

Life is complicated and sometimes we have to leap into action in faith, doing the very best that we can under the circumstances, turning the ultimate end results over to God. If we waited until we were absolutely sure we could execute a task to utter perfection, we'd never get out our seats. But Jesus has a special love for those who've honestly tried and failed; he doesn't take them to task or ask why they were so stupid. "*Stupidity and Glory is everybody's story* [Oysterband]." Jesus wasn't into condemning honest intent. He was into banishing fear from the Kingdom, sending fear into the outer darkness.

In the Kingdom of God, the safe thing is risk; the risky thing is playing it safe. To live in fear is to suffer the loss of a life un-lived. We only get the one gift of life. What living fully in *the joy of the gift of life* means is a mystery to be discovered. We are all unique and must approach this idea uniquely. We must explore the talents we have been given individually and then never be afraid to use them as best we can.

Readiness is achieved by living the Christian life every day, making the most of the opportunities God brings our way, using our God given talents as best we can; all in the name of serving our neighbours, that all may see our good deeds and praise not us but our Father in heaven.

Being ready is actively participating in our own individual way with God's plan to share his love with the whole world and in return to receive our praise.

Readiness is faithfully discharging our responsibilities as disciples of Jesus, whether they be great or small. As disciples of Jesus we are to work on our *own* talents, and not judge the size and scale of other's abilities or responsibilities. Our duty to God is to carry out the roles entrusted to each of us.