One Crowded Hour

Matthew 25:14-30

One of my favourite pieces of verse sums up the point of this parable, I think. It's only four lines long, written way back in 1763. It goes like this:

Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife,
Throughout the sensual world proclaim,
One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name.
(Thomas Mordaunt)

One crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name.

Living life abundantly . . . living life the fullest . . . making the most with what we've been given . . . the gift of life we've been given. That's what this parable is about. And, what we've been given is something amazing . . . we've been given a share in God's kingdom . . . we've been given God's own life . . . so, each day we live in relationship with the God of this universe . . . each day there's possibilities to experience life as God intended it . . . even amidst the mess we make of things . . . even as it looks like the world is spiralling out of control . . . there's still life to be lived.

The question posed by this parable is: How are we going to use what God has given us? What are we doing with the life we've been given?

Like the property owner in the parable, God is a very generous boss . . . he leaves us in charge of everything he's got! He trusts us to manage his kingdom here on earth! And, like the property owner he doesn't sit us down and lay out the exact rules and regulations of how he wants his property to be used. He just assumes we know him well enough to know how he operates . . . to know what's important to him . . . and that's a pretty good assumption considering he's given us the Holy Spirit to guide us.

So, what does that look like for God? How *does* God operate? Well, quite simply, he serves. He serves us . . . we serve others. By serving others we can live God's glorious life. That's how we are to live . . . and, we have the freedom to work out how we will do that.

But, in general terms, say you're an accountant, you can serve others by being honest and diligent, giving your clients the best service possible . . . if you're a husband you can serve your wife by loving and caring for her . . . even if you're a patient lying flat on your back in hospital and it feels like you can't do anything, you can still serve others by praying for them. And, you'll notice there's a common denominator whenever we live this life of service . . . it's always looking outside ourselves . . . that's where abundant life is to be found . . . that's where God's joy is found.

The first two servants in the parable go out and use what was entrusted to them . . . they use it profitably . . . but, the third servant – the one given one talent – he doesn't follow their lead. And, don't think this was only a small amount . . . in today's terms we're probably talking about a million dollars! He had a lot to work with. But, while the first two servants were thinking about

their master . . . they were thinking how they could use their master's property for *his* benefit . . . in a way the master would approve . . . the third servant could only think of . . . himself. He was thinking: "What's going to happen to me if I stuff this up?" He was afraid . . . and when you're afraid your thoughts tend to go inward . . . you start to think about Number 1.

So, the third servant did nothing. He was afraid . . . too afraid to risk the valuable possession he'd been entrusted with. That's what angered the property owner. He wouldn't have cared if the return was minimal, or even if all the money had been lost . . . that wouldn't have bothered him . . . what he wanted was for his things to be used . . . he wanted his servants to experience the joy of living life to the full . . . full of risks, yes, but also full of rewards.

So it is with us . . . God didn't give us his life so we would hide it away in fear of losing out in some way . . . he didn't give us the possibility of sharing his love with others so we could selfishly keep it to ourselves . . . he gave it to us so we would risk giving it away . . . so we would risk losing it even . . . he gave it to us so we would do something with it . . . so that we would live it!

There are so many ways we can use what God has given us . . . so many ways to make a difference in other people's lives . . . so many ways to serve . . . so many ways to bring God's life and God's joy to others.

You don't have to be someone special . . . you don't have to do anything special to look out for someone else . . . you don't have to be a great after-dinner speaker to tell someone about Jesus . . . it doesn't matter who we are . . . each one of us has been given the gift of life and the opportunity to live life to the full . . . we don't have to live in fear . . . God doesn't ask for a certain return . . . he doesn't even ask for <u>any</u> return . . . he just says: "Go and live . . . go and risk what I've given you for the sake of others . . . go and make use of your life". Be who I made you to be. As you do, you'll often be surprised at how much blessing your life brings . . . you'll often be surprised at just what a return you get. Just have a crack.

I'm reminded of the story of the church that started a new building project. One day, the pastor found several boxes of new Bibles sitting in a storeroom. He thought, "Perhaps we could sell these Bibles and raise a bit of money". So, he put a call out for volunteers to go door to door around the neighbourhood. He got three volunteers; two were experienced door to door salesmen, but the third was a recently retired farmer who had just moved to the city. He was a very laid-back character who moved slow and talked even slower in good ol' Aussie bush style.

The pastor had serious doubts about the farmer's ability to sell <u>anything</u> but he didn't want to discourage him, so he sent all three off with a box of Bibles each.

A week later the three men reported back. The first salesman said proudly: "Using my vast experience in sales techniques I was able to sell 20 Bibles, and here's the 200 dollars I collected on behalf of the church."

The second salesman handed over an envelope and said: "Using my gift of the gab and my inherent charm I sold 28 Bibles. Here's 280 dollars"

The pastor turned to the farmer and asked apprehensively, "Did you manage to sell any Bibles last week?"

The farmer handed him an envelope . . . quite a fat envelope . . . the pastor pulled out a huge wad of 10 dollar notes. It took quite a while to count them but it came to $3200.

The pastor was astounded. “You managed to sell 320 Bibles in just one week! That’s amazing! How did you do it?”

The farmer shrugged. “I don’t really know, eh. All I said was: would you like to buy this Bible for ten dollars, or would you like me to stand here and read it to you?”

You see, it doesn’t matter who we are, we can do something with what God has entrusted us with . . . that’s because he’s entrusted us with his life . . . given to us as a free, gracious gift . . . no strings attached . . . through his life we have life and we have it abundantly . . . so, be bold . . . serve boldly . . . one crowded hour of God’s life is surely worth an age without a name.

Amen.

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