

Ordinary 33 2020 Year A The Talents Jud 4:1-7, 1 Thess 5:1-11, **Matt 25:14-30** Scott MALCOLM

Walt is a high school chemistry teacher in Albuquerque New Mexico, he has cancer and no health insurance! To fund his treatment, he becomes a P cook, and then a drug dealer. Over 6 seasons Walt and Walt's family face the consequences of that decision.

Breaking Bad is one of the best TV series for many years.

In many ways it is a parable, much like our gospel reading.

It's a brilliantly told story of cause and effect; sprinkled showers of grace and goodness, fiery flashes of revelation and insight and the thunderclap boom of consequential justice.

Matthew tells us a similar story.

Here too, there are no fudging of lines, no sugaring of medicine, no beating around the bush. Just like Walt, there are choices, just like Walt, those choices have consequences, just like Walt, those choices can be wise or foolish.

Our parable fits into a sequence of parables which run from the story of the faithful and unfaithful slave, the 10 bridesmaids, and now our reading this morning. They are all concerned with the end of time, but ... not that the end is coming, rather, that it hasn't come yet!

The people of Matthews day thought that Jesus return was imminent, in fact they were surprised it hadn't happened already, so these three parables deal with a world where the bridegroom is delayed, the master is a long way off, and after a long, long time, the master comes.

These parables deal with the problem of living in delayed gratification, it caused people to stop their Christian obligations, stop being faithful, being wise, stop using what God had given them. Matthew wants to point out what is happening and what the consequences of this will be. Matthew paints this picture plainly; this is no soft option.

The talents in our parable are not talents as we understand them. They are a quantity, not a quality. A talent was a sum of money!
And the sums are very large.

The story tells that each servant, according to the servant's ability, was given a large sum of money, and they had to multiply it. The comparison seems obvious. Jesus is the master, we are the servants, we have been given a gift according to our ability and we are to make it grow. What that gift is, is up for grabs. It could be grace, it could be mercy, it could be money, it could be the kingdom, it could be anything, ... according to our ability, it is what we have been given.

As the parable goes on, the comparison is also obvious. We have been given a quantity, whatever that is, and we are to make this quantity grow. The master is delayed, his coming has not happened as we thought. It's taking longer than we expected. So, what do we do? Do we need to keep at this? The faithful slave, the wise bridesmaid, the working servant say, yes. We do!
The unfaithful slave, the foolish bridesmaid, the hole digging, burying servant say no. We don't.

In a world, where what we expect to happen, doesn't. In a world where, what we have stalked our lives on, isn't quite what we thought ... it is understandable that commitments, faith, and purpose come under scrutiny. Matthew wants to say, straight up, that the wise, faithful, and best thing to do,

is to keep following our job description. Loving God and loving our neighbour. Making the best use of whatever it is God has given us. Don't bury it in the ground. Don't run scared and hide. Don't shut ourselves away. We invest, we risk, and we play, we make choices and do the best we can with what we have, ... and we trust, ... and we wait.

We wait, until the master returns.

We trust that what we have done is what a good and faithful servant will have done.

And then....as tough as it sounds, choices have consequences.

All servants face the master, and the master does what the master thinks is right.

These parables are about sharpening gospel focus, heightening gospel commitment, so they aren't soft. They are direct, straight forward calls to wisdom, faithfulness and obedience ... and a dire warning of the consequences of not following.

Just like Breaking Bad, these three gospel parables confront the viewer or listener with the balance sheet of the decisions we make.

Wisdom ... Loving God and our neighbour and using what we have been given ... or foolishness ... letting it all go, burying it in the ground, running, hiding, and shutting ourselves away ...

Wisdom or foolishness ... Matthew says ... the choice is ours!

Thanks be to God.

Amen.