



**Leura Uniting Church**  
**ORDER OF SERVICE, 15 November 2020**  
**Louise Mattay**  
**The 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

**Gathering as God's People**

A virtual gathering, due to the Coronavirus pandemic

**Let us worship God**

**Hymn TIS 107**

Sing praise and thanksgiving, let all creatures living  
 now worship their maker with gladness and song;  
 all glory and honour we come to him bringing:

*O praise to the Almighty, sing praise to our God!*

Our lives of his making he brings to their waking;  
 in darkness he held us in his gracious care,  
 now into the light we are called from our sleeping:

*O praise to the Almighty, sing praise to our God!*

Lord, frame our desiring to do your requiring,  
 that unto your glory be all that we do;  
 and where we have faltered, give strength and give healing:

*O praise to the Almighty, sing praise to our God!*

*Paul Gerhardt*  
*Public Domain*

***The Grace***

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ  
 and the love of God  
 and the communion of the Holy Spirit  
 be with you all.

**Prayer**

Let us pray:  
 Mothering God,  
 you are the source of all life and being.  
 In you, we bear the glory of creation.  
 In you, we receive the mystery of grace.  
 In you, we find the wisdom of community.  
 We honour you, Holy Trinity:  
 Mother of Creation,  
 Midwife of Liberation, and  
 Nurturer of Faith. Amen

Let us come to God in a prayer of confession:

Most merciful God  
 we confess that we have sinned against you and our neighbour.  
 We have walked in darkness rather than in light;  
 we have named the name of Christ,  
 but have not departed from iniquity.  
 Have mercy on us, we pray;  
 for the sake of Jesus Christ forgive us all our sins;  
 cleanse us by your Holy Spirit;  
 quicken our consciences;  
 and enable us to forgive others;  
 that we may henceforth serve you in newness of life,

to the glory of your holy name.  
 If we confess our sins,  
 God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins  
 and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.  
 Hear then Christ's word of grace to us:  
 'Your sins are forgiven'.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Doxology** –(tune played, people muted)  
 Praise God, the Source of life and birth;  
 praise God, the Word, who came to earth;  
 praise God, the Spirit, holy Flame;  
 all glory, honour to God's name.

### **Receiving God's Word**

Mark Hillis will now read the Second Reading and the Gospel for the day, the 24<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost

#### **1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 NRSV**

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters,[a] you do not need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! 4 But you, beloved,[b] are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; 5 for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. 6 So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; 7 for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

#### **Matthew 25:14-30 NRSV**

The Parable of the Talents

14 "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15 to one he gave five talents,[a] to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16 The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. 17 In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. 18 But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 22 And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 24 Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' 26 But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 29 For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. 30 As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

**Hymn TIS 137**

For the beauty of the earth,  
for the beauty of the skies,  
for the love which from our birth  
over and around us lies

*Christ, our God, to you we raise  
this our sacrifice of praise.*

For the beauty of each hour  
of the day and of the night,  
hill and vale, and tree and flower,  
sun and moon and stars of light,

*Christ, our God, to you we raise  
this our sacrifice of praise.*

For the joy of human love,  
brother, sister, parent, child,  
friends on earth and friends above,  
for all gentle thoughts and mild,

*Christ, our God, to you we raise  
this our sacrifice of praise.*

For the joy of ear and eye,  
for the heart and mind's delight,  
for the mystic harmony  
linking sense to sound and sight,

*Christ, our God, to you we raise  
this our sacrifice of praise.*

*Folliott Sandford Pierpoint  
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**Proclamation of the Word**

Before I begin, I must admit to a certain amount of plagiarism from a website. My material rests on the work of Paul J Nuechterlein, a Lutheran theologian available on a Girardian website. Should you want further information I shall willingly provide it.

**The Parable of the talents** – well known to most of us, is the Gospel reading for today – to be read and reflected upon by our congregation as we faithfully follow Year A of the three year lectionary cycle which concludes next Sunday. It is one of the parables that Jesus tells shortly before his execution and you can hear his sense of urgency. Just before telling these parables, Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple and a time of terrible disaster for his people. They refuse to listen to him or follow in his WAY OF PEACE, so, Jesus predicts, the Romans will crush them. That's exactly what happened within a generation of Jesus' prophecy.

Immediately after telling these parables, Jesus is delivered into a very dark place. No one, not even his closest disciples, speak up on his behalf. He is whipped, humiliated, and executed as an insurrectionist. He came to bring God's WAY OF PEACE, but no one is willing to follow until after God's Easter vindication and forgiveness.

I don't know about you, but I can recall only one interpretation of this well known text and that is that we each have talents – some more than others – and it is our responsibility to be grateful for what we have received and make sure we use them. However, as I researched this parable, I realised that some scholars have come up with other explanations and that the Greek word for 'talent' very specifically means a unit of money; it has no relationship whatsoever to the word for an ability, so this is NOT a parable about us being the best we can be, no matter how much our culture of achievement wants to twist it into that.

This is what Paul Nuechterlein writes about the value of talents ...". the stakes are high in this parable. A talent was a lot of money. The smallest estimates I've seen as to how much a talent is in our terms has been \$15,000. More common has been the estimate that one talent would be more than \$100,000 in today's economy; so five talents would be more than a half million dollars. Moreover, the parable begins by telling us that this master "entrusted his property" to these servants; he left his very livelihood with them. So the stakes were high. In a sense, they were life and death. If these three servants squandered his money, this master would have had nothing to come back to. And, fortunately, none of them did. Not even the third servant lost anything."

Jesus' parable is about servants who must act with urgency with the gifts given them. The servant who doesn't, suffers consequences: his master takes the gift and throws him out. We are tempted to see the master (in the parable) as God or Jesus and what will happen to us if we fail to use our gifts. But this parable is set in a context where hard taskmasters – the Romans – are in charge. Jesus knows his people will suffer dire consequences under the Romans if they do not respond to the gift given to them – God's gift of a WAY OF PEACE- in Jesus. No one responds with a sense of urgency, not even his disciples; yet they receive many second chances. The consequences will not be dire just for Jesus, they will also be earth-shattering for all Jews. Their Temple will be levelled and Jerusalem reduced to rubble. People will be slaughtered, and their leaders carried off to Rome in humiliation for execution. Their way of life as Jews will never be the same. Yes, there are consequences when God's people fail to have a sense of urgency in standing up to evil – but it is not at the hands of God. This parable is not about what God will do to us if we don't shape up. It's about the very real consequences of what we do to each other if we don't follow Jesus' WAY OF PEACE.

The fact that none of the servants lost any of the master's money is obviously not the point of the story. If it were, the third servant would not have come to such a nasty fate, because he was the one who acted most prudently in making sure not a cent was lost. No, what is crucial in this parable is how their relationship with the master caused these servants to act when the stakes were high. In other words, most crucial is their faith in their master. This is most explicit for the third servant who says that he acted as he did out of fear. This third servant is simply governed by the relationship he himself perceives with his master. He is afraid of a harsh man, so that's exactly what he gets! In other words, the problem of the servant, who received one talent and went and buried it, is not its lack of yield, but how he imagined that his master would treat him: It is this third servant's fear of his master, his unfaith, that has determined both his behaviour and his fate. The other two servants, on the other hand...who imagine their master as free, audacious and generous, take risks and thus enter into a fruitfulness that is ever richer and more creative. .

To sum up:

The parable of the talents, is not all about numbers and money. It is about the trust the master places in these servants, and then the kind of trust they place in him. The first two servants return that trust, believing in a gracious master. The third doesn't. The first two servants are then entrusted with even more, experiencing the joy of their masters household. The third, by virtue of his mistrust, is left out.

The kind of God that one knows – in other words, one's faith – makes all the difference in the world – especially when the stakes are highest.

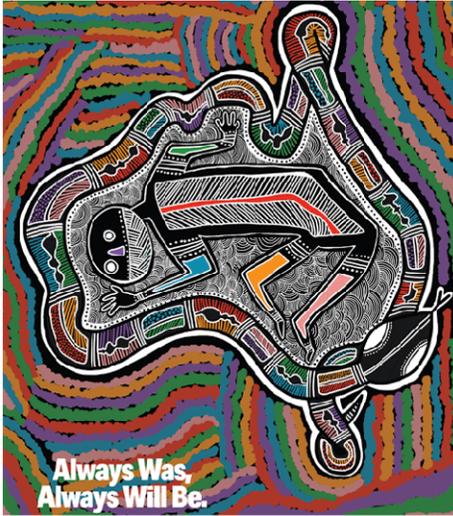
and a quotation by another theologian, James Alison: "The key feature of this parable is that it is the imagination of the servants as to what their master is like which is the determining factor of their conscience and thus the wellspring of their activity.

**Offering:** *Let us listen to the music and make our "virtual" offerings to God, thanking God for all the blessings the Almighty God bestows on us.*

Everything in the universe comes from you, Lord. We give you only what is yours.  
May you be praised for ever.

**Notices and concerns of the church**

**Prayers of the people** this morning will be led by Denise



Lord God, Creator, and Sustainer of life, we stand in awe before the touch of life you have given to our world, and your goodness to us shown in the delights we enjoy daily. God you have shown your love that you gave us Jesus.

Lord Jesus Christ, you built your church on the rock of redeemed humanity. St Margaret of Scotland is remembered for her service and generosity to the poor and courage to be steadfast in her Christian faith. We are thankful for those people who have encouraged us in our faith. We are called to, give hope; value and encourage others. God, help us to take the risk and speak the words of compassion and challenge and not hide ourselves from scrutiny.

***Prayer for our response***

We thank you, God for giving us great riches by creating a world which provides the capacities of the human mind and culture. You are in our interactions with other people, and in recreation and exploration. But for all of this is to be enjoyed not for ourselves but for the contributions we can make to our neighbourhood and our church.

*Response - Hear our prayer*

***Prayer for unity***

In NAIDOC Week we celebrate and understand the deep spiritual and cultural diversity of those who walked here first – *Always was and always be*. Give us the willingness to listen to the truth telling of indigenous people who for many generations are and have been hurt and experienced pain. The First Nation Peoples are very willing to share their journey and their hopes to go forward.

*Response - Hear our prayer*

***Prayer for justice***

Draw leaders close to their people. Draw them close to their suffering. Help them to see the promise of each child, the strength of youth who dream. Unlock the cages. Task those in power to protect the least with food and water not with armed guards in watchtowers. Challenge our implicit bias of who belongs and who does not. Send your messengers to those who would build structures that divide and deny. Remind us that our institutions like physical structures can act like walls and prisons denying human rights and causing terrible isolation. We pray mightily for justice.

*Response - Hear our prayer*

***Prayer for others***

We pray for those we know who are unwell and we ask for your healing hand to be on them. Give them your love and peace and comfort.

*Response - Hear our prayer*

Lord your tent so vast as the universe, we see at night it contains us in all times. This world is trembling. Call our faith. This world so broken. Call our active hope. This world is so tender. Call our love.

We pray this in Your name sake,

**Amen**

## The recognition of a Calendar of Other Commemorations

I think many of you would know that the Uniting Church has introduced a Calendar of Other Commemorations into its worship opportunities consisting of a table of 95 faithful people throughout the centuries, divided into various categories such as Christian pioneer, faithful servant, martyr, Renewer of Society, - 9 groups in all – outstanding contributors to the Christian movement in history– none seeking their own glory, as were the Pharisees, referred to in one of the readings we had a few weeks ago when Mark took the service. A date for the commemoration of each person is given in the Leader's book, usually a date of significance in that person's life. I wondered if anyone was listed for today's date and discovered that the name **Margaret of Scotland** was close to it, 16th November being the date of her death and 'faithful servant' the words next to it. Margaret of Scotland – meant absolutely nothing to me.

Here is her story.

Margaret of Scotland was an English princess born in Hungary around 1045 to Princess Agatha of Hungary and English Prince Edward, known as the Exile. She and her family returned to England when she was 10 years old and her father, Prince Edward was called back from exile, as a potential successor to the throne. However, the prince died very soon after the family arrived. Margaret and her brother, Edgar, continued to reside at the English court. Following William the Conqueror's victory at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, Margaret's mother, (Princess Agatha, whose husband died when they returned to England) decided to leave Northumbria and return to the continent, but her family's ship got caught in a storm. The storm drove their ship even further north to Scotland, where they were shipwrecked in 1068. The spot they landed on was part of the Orkney Islands, now known as 'St Margaret's Hope. (Show picture)

The account now merges into "tradition", rather than exact facts, which makes for a 'happy ending' and this is how it goes.

Malcolm Canmore 111, King of Scotland came down to the shore, where they were shipwrecked, to meet and greet the family – and see – here is a picture to prove it. – King Malcolm put them under his protection. He soon fell deeply in love with the beautiful and kind princess. Margaret and Malcolm married in 1070 at the castle of Dunfermline. They had 8 children, 6 sons and 2 daughters, all of whom were raised with deep Catholic Christian faith and they lived as a holy family, a domestic church.

It all sounds very fairytale so far doesn't it. But Margaret was no pampered wife.

She attended to charitable works, serving orphans and the poor every day before she ate and washed the feet of the poor in imitation of Christ. She rose at midnight every night to attend the liturgy. She successfully invited the Benedictine Order to establish a monastery in Dunfermline, Fife in 1072, and established ferries at Queensferry and North Berwick to assist pilgrims journeying from south of the Firth of Forth to St. Andrew's in Fife. It sounds as though she was encouraging tourism, doesn't it, but in those days pilgrimage was a very serious and sacred affair to foster devotion and seek forgiveness.

She used a cave on the banks of the Tower Burn in Dunfermline as a place of devotion and prayer. St. Margaret's cave, now covered beneath a municipal car park, is open to the public.

Among other deeds, Margaret also instigated the restoration of Iona Abbey in Scotland. Perhaps this may be a reason for the Uniting Church in Australia to include her in their very selective list.

Margaret was as pious privately as she was publicly. She spent much of her time in prayer, devotional reading and ecclesiastical embroidery. This apparently had considerable effect on the more uncouth Malcolm, who was illiterate: he so admired her piety that he had her books decorated in gold and silver. One of these, a pocket gospel book with portraits of the Evangelists, is in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, England. (picture) Malcolm was apparently ignorant of the long term effects of Margaret's endeavours, not being especially religious himself. He was content for

her to pursue her reforms as she desired, which was a testament to the strength of and affection in their marriage.

Margaret's husband, King Malcolm, and their eldest son, Edward, were killed in the Battle of Alnwick against the English on 13 November, 1093. Not yet 50 years old, Margaret died on 16 November, 1093, 3 days after the deaths of her husband and eldest son.

She was venerated as a saint in the Anglican Church and 200 years later, in 1250 canonised by Pope Innocent 1V.

In 1560 Mary Queen of Scots had Margaret's skeletal head removed to Edinburgh Castle as a relic to assist her in childbirth- which, she claimed, it did.

I think that is enough to acquaint you with this remarkable woman, one of the 95 people brought to our attention by the Uniting Church in its very selective list of people whose faith and commitment can still shine brightly down the centuries, if we take the time to look.

Please follow the words as the music plays:

### Hymn TIS 677

Christ's is the world in which we move;  
Christ's are the folk we're summoned to love;  
Christ's is the voice that calls us to care,  
and Christ is the one who meets us here.

*To the lost Christ shows his face,  
to the unloved he gives his embrace,  
to those who cry in pain or disgrace,  
Christ makes, with his friends,  
a touching place.*

Feel for the people we most avoid –  
strange or bereaved or never employed.  
Feel for the women and feel for the men  
who feel that their living is all in vain.

*Chorus*

Feel for the parents who've lost their child,  
feel for the women whom men have defiled,  
feel for the baby for whom there's no breast,  
and feel for the weary who find no rest.

*Chorus*

Feel for the lives by life confused,  
riddled with doubt, in loving abused;  
feel for the lonely heart, conscious of sin,  
which longs to be pure but fears to begin

*Chorus*

CCLI Song # 4174611

Graham Maule | John L. Bell

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### Being sent on God's Mission

1 Thessalonians 5:6-8

"So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep, sleep at night and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober and put on the breast plate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation"

May the grace of Christ attend you;  
the love of God surround you;  
and the Holy Spirit keep you;  
this day and for ever. Amen