

**Sermon preach by Rev'd. Cynthia Jackson, St. Mary's Wimbledon, 2<sup>nd</sup> before Advent, 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2014.**

Do you remember the build-up to the celebrations of the Millennium in the lead up to 31 December 1999? I was still working with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea at that time. I remember we were told to be prepared in case our computer system crashed due to a predicted Y2K computer bug and we had to take various precautions. Different predictions from the leaders of cults around the world were announcing that the end of the world would happen, the anti-Christ would appear. Judgement Day would be upon us. As we know the end of the world did not happen and I do not remember any problems happening to the computers of the Royal Borough!

We believe in a God who is loving and merciful; a God who forgives and heals revealed to us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. A God who wants to restore men and women's lives and bring them back to him; a God, who was willing to sacrifice his son to that end. But do we believe in a God who judges us?

We constantly judge other people and ourselves. When we meet someone new we immediately analyse their appearance, we listen to their accent. We do this without realising it – sometimes in a friendly way but at other times critically. We may be the type of person who judges ourselves harshly, not able to believe in a loving God, nor able to acknowledge that we are a loved child of God. It took me until I was in my forties to suddenly realise that God loved as I was, I did not have to earn that love, it was a free gift. So judging is something that is with us everyday for good or ill.

The Prophet Zephaniah is writing in the late seventh century B. C., about 630 years before the birth of Jesus. The people of Jerusalem and its surroundings cities were worshipping Yahweh as their God but also other gods as well.

Zephaniah recognised this and warned the people of the judgement that would come as a result. The passage selected for the lectionary reading today is very depressing, however, Zephaniah also gives hope to the faithful remnant that have remained true to the worship of the one true God. We find this encouragement if we read onto to chapter 3 verse 12:

*"For I will leave in the midst of you  
a people humble and lowly.  
They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord.  
– the remnant of Israel;  
they shall do no wrong,  
and utter no lies,  
nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths.  
Then they will pasture and lie down,  
and no one shall make them afraid". (Zephaniah 3:12 – 13).*

Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians encourages the Thessalonians to be children of the light not children of darkness. They are to be vigilant and ready for the day of our Lord's return, which Paul thought was imminent. The Thessalonians are encouraged to put on the breastplate of faith and love and relevant to us today. We are called to be ready for the day when our Lord Jesus Christ will return, even though we do not know when that will be.

Paul reminds us that, "... For *God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us.* " (Thess.5:9).

So again we are encouraged when our faith is dim to put our trust in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We may think of the parable of the talents in Matthew's Gospel as very harsh and reflecting a judgemental God, not a God of love and compassion. This parable is a story about God and Israel . Jesus has denounced the scribes and Pharisees and in the parable are represented by the wicked servant who hid his master's money and buried it in the ground so it was of no use. A talent was a unit of money, worth roughly what a labourer could earn in 15 years!

The scribes and Pharisees had heard Jesus' teaching but they had rejected it for themselves. They have been given the promises about how God would bless not only Israel but through Israel the whole world, but they had not taken on these responsibilities. The scribes and Pharisees had been given the Law of Moses and the Temple. They had buried this treasure.

What about the other servants and their use of the talents given to them? Tom Wright in his commentary on Matthew's Gospel writes:

*... "The other servants, it seems, those who hear the call of Jesus and, on that basis, develop what Israel has already be given so that it now becomes something new. They are like the mustard seed, which starts small and then grows large. They are the signs that God's kingdom is starting to bud and blossom. And now, when Jesus has come to Jerusalem to force the final confrontation between God's kingdom and the system that had resisted and opposed it – then those who are loyal to him will be like those who made wise use of the money that had been entrusted to them."...*

So we are challenged today to ask ourselves which one of the servants are we? Hopefully we are like the servants who responded to Jesus' teaching and used their talents wisely. We can be like mustard seeds growing and blossoming in our Christian faith responding to the light and not to the darkness. At the same time being prepared for the day of our Lord Jesus Christ's return; a day when a merciful and loving God will judge us.

Amen

16.11.14