

## Sermon: 16 November 2008

Text: Matthew 25: 13-40

In 'Seven Sacred Pauses' (p23) Macrina Wiederkehr writes:

*We belong to this earth, and the work we do is ultimately for the purpose of making our world a better place in which to live. When we begin our day, most of us probably do not approach our work with the awareness and belief that we are artists involved in continuing the work of creation. From the most sublime to the most menial, work is creativity.*

*[If we could truly believe this many things might change in our workplaces and in our world at large. It is not necessarily our work that is the problem; perhaps it is our inability to be a loving companion to our work.]*

*The Indian poet Kahlil Gibran suggests that our work is our love made visible. The way we approach our work is vital to our happiness and the good we are going to be able to do as artists and co-creators with God. The attitude with which we approach our work determines whether or not our work will become a 'love made visible.'*

I have been sitting with the parable of the talents this week.

A man is going about to look after his business interests and needs someone to oversee his assets at home. Now this is a very rich man.

One talent is equal to 15 years wages for a labourer.

So this man hands over 5 talents to one - that is 75 years wages - unheard of.

He gives 2 talents to a second - that's equivalent to 30 years wages - more than a lifetime's worth.

And 1 talent to a third...

such extravagance, such trust. Yet all receive some talents. The reign of God is like this says Jesus.

The first, as we know, invested this untold wealth immediately and made an unheard of amount, doubling his investment! The second did the same - obviously no financial crisis in those days! The third buried his to keep it safe - it was so much money...

Some interpreters claim the third one was the hero, not buying into unjust systems of exploitation - opting out of the market - challenging the system perhaps? But how did his way help the poor and make the world a better place?

I am attracted to Macrina Wiederkehr's view that we are artists involved in continuing the work of creation.

'We have an extravagant opportunity to make something of the gifts we've been given - to make our work 'a love made visible' to the good of all humanity. An artist grows her gifts by practicing, discipline, education, supervision, peer support, rest and maintaining a close link with the source of creation - the creator and gift giver.'

On Monday, I woke flat as a pancake; weary, not knowing whether my tiredness was physical or mental. I walked early, then in reviewing the previous few days, I realised they had been pretty full on. So, on Monday, I went gently, restfully - beginning reflection on my sermon, attending to emails, calling people. Then around 11.45am, I drove to the Botanic Gardens and strolled for half an hour. I drank in the colour of the flowers, a beautiful orange and red hakea, vivid red bottle brush, pink, mauve, orange, white and yellow daisies, pale yellow frilly eucalypt blossom, river blue sky. I watched the parrots feeding and listened to their bell-like call. Some peace and spaciousness returned to my soul.

My next appointment was at Tilleys. I played peek-a-boo with a child in the next booth as I waited. I watched some interesting grey headed women catching up. I listened to the person I was with, soaking in their words and demeanour - attentive, focussed.

Later in the day I did a massage, grounding me (and hopefully my client) and reinforcing the peace.

More emails, listening to someone else, then a rare night at home; read; chat; even watch a bit of tele!

Monday was a reviving day of creation and recreation for me.

Macrina Wiederkehr ('Seven Sacred Pauses' p22) relates '*You may have heard the story about some westerners who hired a few bushmen guides to help them travel through the Kalahari Desert. Not being used to moving at the pace their employers were expecting, the bushmen suddenly sat down to rest, and no amount of persuasion could induce them to continue the journey until they were ready. The reason for this much needed rest, the bushmen explained, was that they had to wait for their souls to catch up. [Macrina reflects 'Stories come to us when we need them, and it is my hunch that this is a story we need today. Indigenous peoples often have an innate awareness of the need to honour the natural pace and rhythm of their inner beings. They seem able to pick up signals drawing them into a stance of obedient listening. ]*

*The bushmen of the Kalahari called this ancient knowing "the tapping of the heart".*

*I wonder how we can learn to listen to the 'tapping of the heart' in our frenetic world?*

*[How can we become more aware of the yearning in our hearts for the healing balm of solitude? 'p23]*

*These grace filled moments; these 'tapping of the heart' are offered every day - even to workaholics. It is a matter of living with open eyes and sometimes a rearrangement of our values.*

*'Our work enables us to bring grace and beauty to our world' p24*

*'For this reason we need to learn how to work from the heart' to be attentive to the present moment; to pause; to breathe p25*

*'In 'The Way of Chang Tzi', edited and compiled by Thomas Menton, a marvellous story is told via the poem 'The Wood Carver'. In this poem a master wood carver is commissioned to carve a bell stand for the high court. Upon viewing the completion of the wood carver's exquisite piece of art, the prince of Lu wants to understand the secret of this marvellous masterpiece. With beautiful simplicity and humility, the artist claims there is no secret. When he received this assignment, he put his entire being into the work, guarding his spirit from any sort of trivia that would take his mind away from the task at hand. He fasted so as to have a pure and single heart to bring to the work. In his mind's eye he constantly beheld the perfect bell stand holding the bell that would call people to work or prayer.*

*In claiming that there was no special secret, the wood carver was suggesting that the perfection of the bell stand was due to the loving dedication and undivided attention give to the task. We all have the potential to give ourselves wholeheartedly to whatever it is we must do. To honour our task, this is the gift of mindfulness' (p25) ('Living mindfully is the art of living awake and ready to embrace the gift of the present moment' p2)*

*p26 - 'Living mindfully is not an option for those who want to live healthy lives. Healthy living necessitates finding a balance between work, prayer, and leisure.' p26*

We need to practice daily, and wake up to our own inner call to listen to the tapping of our heart. We can grow our gifts for the good of the world.

Living mindfully is a challenge.

*p27 'No matter what your work entails (what your talents); housework, laundry, personal contacts, business meetings, preparing for workshops, yardwork, writing, composing, teaching, cooking, raising children, (fill in your own labour of love) - realise that you are an artist. In some small way you are continuing the work of creation. Remember to pause. (p27 Macrina Wiederkehr 'Seven Sacred Pauses - Living Mindfully through the Hours of the Day, Sorin Books, Notre Dame, Indiana 2008)*

So the work you are creating can grow the parable of the talents encourage us to be extravagant in work and play and to let God's life-giving grace and compassion flow through us to do a power of good in our neighbourhood and beyond.

Imaging God's gifts as money (talents) is controversial especially when money is so often used to exclude and oppress.

Do we bury the life of God fearful of punishment if under-achieving?

God's life-giving power let loose in the world brings so much possibility and love and compassion (Seasons Of the Spirit p90)

Dare we allow God's love to push us into adventures beyond our imagination; investing the gifts we receive for the sake of God's ??

How do you use your gifts to continue the work of creation?

In what will you invest in a mindful way? children's ministry, youth, elderly, workshops, prayer, caring for community and world, working for peace and justice?