



Stewardship Season: Talents

Using our talents to enable others to know that ‘God id God’

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Fiona Mathieson, minister of Edinburgh: Carrick Knowe for her thoughts on the stewardship of talents.

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Leviticus 19: 17-18

The book of Leviticus is more important and relevant to today than it may first seem. Can a book of Laws laid down for the Israelites still have relevance to today's communities of faith? So our first task is to make the material understandable so that people might grasp the meaning contained within these verses.

As with other parts of the Bible there is a concern of holiness, and how we can be holy running through chapter 19; what does God mean as holy? Holiness has typically been thought to involve separation from others and from the world. However it has also been seen as wholeness and completeness.

When we look at these verses we might discern what they are saying to us in the context of two textual insights.

The first is the refrain 'I am the Lord'. This is found throughout chapter 19, it occurs some fifteen times. While some might observe that the book of Leviticus is a mishmash of laws, in fact through this myriad of rule the nature and holiness of God is revealed. 'I am the Lord.'

The second insight derives from the first. The collection of laws given could be seen as a little strange and so we could be drawn to conclude that the holiness of God which they reveal is also strange. Which leaves us with the hugely relevant post-modern question 'What kind of God is this?'

These laws which can seem a little odd to our present-day ears are in fact hugely pertinent to contemporary communities of faith. People come to know that God is God through our obeying the guideline for life that he has outlined. In these specific verses (Leviticus 19:17-18) we are told that it is in our treatment of our neighbours that Gods holiness is made manifest and proclaimed to the world. People see that 'God is God' through faith communities.

Love is never an abstract concept in ancient Israel, it was marked by real actions. If we love God we will love our neighbours, by using the gifts that we have to support them and encourage them to become the people God envisages.



Acts 20: 32-35

This part of the book of Acts is set in a context where people live in a hierarchical society. If we give to others there is a sense of power and of superiority, and that the act of receiving may have a painful consciousness of obligation.

The foundation on which the axiom rests is that giving is the result of love and self-sacrifice. Whenever they are not found, the giving is not the type of giving which 'blesses him that gives.' If you give with some thought of what you yourself will get by it, or for the sake of putting some one under obligation, or giving indifferently as a matter of compulsion or routine; then you have got it wrong. It is the motivation of our giving and the way in which we give which is important. What should be at work in us is two godlike emotions. To be delivered from making ourselves the most important thing in our lives, and to be delivered from any feeling that what we have in terms of the 'possessions' is the most important thing in life. It is heaven on earth to love and to give oneself away.

The old epitaph is profoundly true, 'What I kept I lost. What I gave I kept.'

Mark 10: 35-45

This passage follows on from Jesus' final passion prediction in Marks Gospel. Jesus is now being more directive in what he says than in the parables which required more interpretation. Although they have asked for this clarity still the disciples don't fully understand. However, despite that here on the threshold of Jerusalem we are shown how far the disciples have come in their understanding of Jesus, themselves and indeed the Kingdom of God. The focal point is on the identity if Jesus as the soon to be betrayed, rejected, killed and rising 'Son of Man'. In disclosing this Jesus wanted the disciples to see that this was the way in which he wanted them to use the gifts that they had been given, not for themselves, not to 'save' themselves but to serve others by following in his footsteps.

They were asked to be people who would:

- Deny themselves, and take action even if it might mean rejection by those around them.
- Focus on Jesus and what he taught them.
- Be dependent on God, giving him control.



- Not get involved in political games of competitiveness and one-upmanship but instead choose to be least of all and to serve all.
- Not be focused on what they have in terms of possessions but instead think about what they can give.

Essentially Jesus was deconstructing all that was familiar to the disciples in terms of what the shape of leadership should be. Jesus points them to his own way of being as a paradigm – And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (vs 42, 43).

Sermon ideas

How do people know God? How do they come to see his work in the world and in their lives? Using our talents in the church can sometimes feel as if we are constantly ‘on the go’ undertaking the many tasks which keeps our Kirk functioning. Here in these passages we are asked to look again at our motivation. If that motivation comes from our need for recognition then we have sadly missed one of the central precepts of the Christian faith, that of serving others. We care for others because we are commanded by God to do so and so that those whose lives we touch may be know that ‘God is God’.

For each community and church there will be many examples of unsung saints, people who over the generations have simply shown Gods love by small acts of service.

In thinking about how we use our talents in the service of God and Christ in the Church here in Scotland you might want to consider two things:

1. How can you as a congregation enable others to serve the local community? What are the real needs? Worship is vital to nurture and sustain us. However if the building lies cold, damp and listless for the rest of the week are we using our talents, are we using the gifts we have been given effectively? Perhaps more importantly are we using them as God would wish?
2. We need to tell our story and through telling that story enable people to know that ‘God is God’.



For three years I convened the Communications Group of the Council of Assembly. Over that time new staff began to work with us on our media team. These highly talented media specialists who had come from prominent news agencies in Scotland were simply amazed at what we as a church do in the public sphere and in local communities. Often they would talk about pulling back the curtain on what is done and has been done for generations. This is not about being proud or arrogant, it is in essence about telling our story allowing people to see how God is at work though the church, to help people to see that 'God is God'.

And in our own lives we keep to over some our natural reticence. In telling others of our involvement in the church they can see its relevance in our lives and hopefully in their lives.

If we keep quiet, if we do not speak, if we do not use our talents how will others know that 'God is God'.

Time with Children

Preparation: for a couple of weeks before this service ask people to bring clean, empty glass jars to church. Or you can buy glass jars relatively cheaply on line or in supermarkets and home furnishing stores.

Activity: Depending on the size of your group have the jars on a trolley or table. How many jars are there? How could we find out? (by counting) How do we do that? (one by one) What other things can we count? (You may get some interesting answers here!) Over the next couple of weeks every time you do something which involves you using a gift that God has given you I want you to write it on a bit of paper and put it in the jar. Then in a fortnight bring the Jars back and we can talk about –

- What talents we have
- How we use them so that other people might know God through what we do.

You might want to sing an adaptation of the old chorus 'Count your blessing'-

Count your talents Count them one by one

Count your talents see what God can do

Count your talents see them one by one

And then you will see what God has given you.



Prayers

Gathering Prayer

Loving God we come to worship You this morning,
as we gather help us to see all that You have given us,
all that we have that will help us to show those we know
that You are at work in the world. **Amen.**

Prayers of Approach, Thanksgiving and Confession

Omnipresent God with a sense of awe and wonder we come into Your presence.
You created us and You know us well,
what gifts we have, the potential there is in each one of us.

While we were in our mother's womb each a unique being knitted together by Your love
the capacity for living in community, serving others helping them and ourselves to know You
was grown there also.

You are rightly due our deep gratitude and thanks.

And we are thankful God for all that You give us.

The ability to make friendship, to laugh and sing, to eat and drink
and be with others sharing together learning from each other, supporting each other.

For all the groups that we are part of we thank You,
for this group of faithful people with whom we worship we thank You.

When we take what we have for granted,
God forgive us.

When we are ungrateful for what we have wanting more,
God forgive us.

When we think that the talents and gifts You have given us are simply for our own use,
God forgive us.



Enable us, no matter how shy we might be, no matter how scared we might be to trust in You, to follow You, to do what You ask so that all may come to know that 'You are God'.

As we pray together these familiar words which You taught us through your son, help us to be mindful of what they ask us to be and to do, *Our Father...*

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God Your love is there for all who are open to You.

We ask that You might motivate us to reach out to those who come into our lives in whatever way so that they might know You, Your love, that they might know that You are God.

Those who have built walls of silence around them because of a hurt, or a wrongdoing, or an action long past.

People who have hardened their heart to You believing that they can rely on themselves and who find life is confusing or broken or frightening.

Those known and unknown to us who feel isolated and who want to reach out to You but don't know how to, may they be open to the hospitality of others through which they might come to know You.

We pray for this community of Your people here in... (insert name of church or community)... may we be brave rather than being complacent, may we be bold rather than retiring, may we follow Your call with trusting faith so that Your will may be done and Your kingdom may come.

Jesus Christ who pushed the barriers, who called and people from what is comfortable, Ruffle our feathers, stir in us a fresh excitement in Your word and indeed in You so that we might use all that we have been given by You to show all who surround us that You are God.

Amen.



Musical suggestions

CH4 166	Lord of all hopefulness
CH4 181	For the beauty of the earth
CH4 211	Today I awake
CH4 213	Every new morning
CH4 374	From heaven you came
CH4 543	Longing for light
CH4 622	We sing a love
CH4 694	Brother Sister let me serve you
Fischy Music: 'We're on this road' 'You are a Star'	



Additional Resources

Pray Now is designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers.

Word of Life is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



SPIRITUALITY OF CONFLICT

The [Spirituality of Conflict](#) website publishes reflections on the Sunday gospel readings in the 3-year lectionary cycle of the church. The reflections explore the themes of conflict within the gospels and offer questions and commentary for private reading, group discussions and public worship. Whilst most of the content will be connected to the

Revised Common Lectionary, some will relate to occasions throughout the year – everything from St Patrick's Day to World AIDS Day. All of the content is free to download, use and share with others.

[Quick Guides](#) are designed to help people with the various elements of leading worship, gathering community and ordering space.

Quick Guide...

You may wish to email these three links to the people reading

Scripture on Sunday to support them in their involvement in worship: [Managing your nerves](#); [Creative readings](#); [Worship at the Lectern](#)



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday archive material and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#).

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Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.



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