

Newington Methodist Church
Church Lane, Newington, Sittingbourne, ME9 7JT

News and views for the week commencing 15 November

The church building
remains closed in
November and until
further notice.



Notices

- **Sunday on line service at 10:30am**, Sunday service – will be led by Rev Robin Selmes and Hartlip Methodist Church. The service can be found on YouTube at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUBLLP_9Hns
- You're also invited to join in the **Newington social catch-up before the service at 9am** online using Zoom at : <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4628098433> (or use meeting ID 462 809 8433) ... or join by telephone: 020 3481 5237 (charged at the standard national rate); when requested enter meeting ID 462 809 8433 followed by #; press # again when asked for a participant ID
- **Sunday's service on line**, on 22 November will be led Ann Mathews from Brent

Coffee morning fellowship – at our usual Coffee morning, on the first Saturday of the month, we were talking about our favourite books. It was an inspiring and pleasant conversation, revealing a little bit more about our personalities. Hmmm We also agreed to have a Christmas coffee morning special (*first Saturday in December*). The theme will be: Our favourite Christmas music. Wait for the log in details from Martin.

Reflection and prayer by Gillian Collins

The Parable of the Talents – Matthew 25:1-13

In these times of Covid-related restrictions, we've become familiar with the importance of "risk assessment". The freedoms we took for granted – to meet socially as we worship, to chat and eat and drink and even sing together – have been suspended, temporarily we all hope, in the interest of protecting each other from the spread of disease. Though as much of possible of the Church's work in serving the needs of members and the local community is continuing in modified ways, we've all had to weigh up our own personal risk. We are in a time of waiting – for a return to something more like normality – and during such times it's easy and understandable to lose focus and commitment unless we work hard to maintain them.

I'm even finding that this experience colours the way I read the parables in Matthew's Gospel about waiting (Matthew 25) and how to live in preparedness while we wait. My life seems to have shrunk in many ways, as so many of the things which gave it meaning – worship, travel, social life and family – have now become "risky". I suppose I'm generally quite a cautious person, not attracted to deliberately risky activities like extreme sports, gambling or throwing money around. So I kind of empathise with one of the characters in today's parable, who seems to have undertaken a reasonable risk assessment and gets thoroughly told off for it.

In this story, a landowner goes away on a trip and leaves three servants in charge of his money, each entrusted with a different amount in accordance with his abilities. When the landowner returns there's the predictable day of reckoning. Matthew's audience, followers of Jesus in the early Church, were also enduring a time of waiting. They expected Jesus to return soon, but as time went on and this didn't happen, they were becoming disheartened, and finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their fellowship and continue to live the servant lifestyle as portrayed in the Gospel (Hebrews 10:25). The temptation was either to give up the struggle or to hunker down and wait for it all to be over. Yet the three parables about waiting were all about keeping alert and ready, and being prepared for judgment which could arrive at any moment, whether as a cosmic event or as the ending of each individual life. Going to sleep, hibernating until it's all over (which I admit I've sometimes wished for since March!) is just not an option.

This parable of the talents has been interpreted in many ways. Some Christians advocate the benefits of investing wealth in venture capitalism, teaching that its material rewards are pleasing to God and will be repaid with success in life. Others reframe the 'talents' in the story (which at the time really did refer to money) as our gifts and graces, reminding us to exercise stewardship in our use of the resources God has entrusted to us. The first of these, the so-called Prosperity Gospel, is popular of course with those who have plenty of material wealth already. Methodists have traditionally found the Stewardship model more appealing – in fact the concept of Stewardship is embedded in our church culture and governance, understood as careful management aligned with Kingdom principles of kindness, compassion and justice.

Often this parable is used to teach such lessons as, "Don't hide your light under a bushel" – in other words, make sure you use your God-given talents. There is a message here about stewardship – making full and proper use of everything God has given us – but it's also a parable about faith and trust in God, especially in a time of waiting when the future is unclear and it's easy to lose heart.

God has entrusted us with the most precious gift there is, the gift of life, and all that accompanies it. Now God trusts us to use the life we've been given as we see fit, but Jesus warns us that at some point we are going to have to account for the choices we make. Two of the servants in the story did what was expected of them, and sought to use their Master's resources to his best advantage. The third, being risk-averse (that word again!), lacked the confidence to put the money to any useful purpose. He opted out, 'hibernated' if you like, and through inaction he wasted the opportunity to use what had been entrusted to him to glorify the Master and to realise his own potential.

It's hard to accept the implications of this message while our possibilities for action as individuals and as a Church are, for now, quite limited. But are we keeping our ears and eyes open for new challenges or opportunities God may be bringing our way? How have we tried to keep alert and prepared for whatever God has in store for us? An example: maybe you used to be a technophobe, but have grasped the opportunity to learn the mysteries (and risks!) of life online, with all its Zoom and YouTube. The internet may have been a foreign territory for many people, but in itself it opens

the way to learning and understanding of new ways we may use our God-given resources of time, money and talents in the service of the Master.

A Prayer

God, whose son Jesus Christ was prepared to take the risk of living his life to its full potential, help us to trust in your strength and guidance so that we have the courage to risk taking action against injustice, speaking up on behalf of those who have no voice and wisely using the gifts you have given us, so that when we are called to account we may hear you say, "Well done, faithful servant." **Amen.**

People and places for prayer

- Praise the Lord with all your strength, mind and heart. Give thanks for the latest announcement about the new vaccine.
- Pray for all people. People in government, businesses, community and the church family.
- We pray for **unlock** down, and the coming Christmas season. Pray for people to remain careful, families to get together and all those who do not like Christmas, for whatever reason, to be comforted and remembered.
- We pray for America after the elections. May God bring peace and healing to the whole nation. May he also give wisdom and wise practices to Mr Joe Biden as he takes office.
- Beryl and Peter, Margaret N, Val T. , Michael and Ro
- We remember our friends who have died and their loved ones: Audrey, Margaret S.

Riddle

If you break me I do not stop working; if you touch me I may be snared; if you lose me nothing will matter. (The source from internet)

Answer to last week's puzzler: Your comfort zone

Please send news, prayer requests and any other contributions for inclusion in the weekly newsletter to robert.zachar@gmail.com

Bank details for Offerings:

Newington Methodist Church, HSBC Sittingbourne. Sort Code 40 – 42 – 04, Account 70614696. If you prefer to send a cheque contact our church treasurer Chris Ch.