

<b>Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2012</b> <b>Cathedral, Grahamstown</b> <b>7.30 &amp; 9.30 a.m.</b>		<b>Stewardship – Time and Talents</b> <b>(24<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year B)</b> <b>St Andrew’s College</b> <b>(9.30 a.m. service)</b>
Deut 30:15-20	Ps 119:1-8	Galatians 6:7-9
		Matthew 25:14-30
<b>Our lives, gifts and talents</b>		

“I call heaven and earth to witness ... that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live...” (Deut 30:19)

A special welcome at our 9.30 a.m. service to boys and staff from St Andrew’s College. We welcome boys from Graham House and from Mullins House, with housemasters Mr Craig Cuyler and Mr Simon Holderness; and senior prefects Grant Rautenbach (Mullins) and Tanaka Lusengo (Graham). It is always good to have you with us. This is Michaelmas term for you all, because Sept 29<sup>th</sup> is the Feast of St Michael and All Angels - which is also the Patronal Festival, the birthday, for our Cathedral, the Cathedral of St Michael & St George. Matrics are doing the count-down, finals are not that far off, prefect selection is occupying the minds of some. Our prayers are with you all at this time.

## **Stewardship**

September is the month of spring; and in the life of the Cathedral September is “Stewardship Month”, culminating in our Patronal Festival, when we rededicate to God our lives, our resources, our gifts and talents, so that we may be good stewards of all we have been given.

Stewardship is a big word. What does it mean? We used to think of stewards as those who waited on others, at tables in a hotel, or in aeroplanes. But now we talk of waitrons and cabin crew. If I am a steward, it means I have been given something to care for. I may have been given a dog or a rabbit to look after, on behalf of the family. Or I

may be given a particular responsibility, as a leader, perhaps a prefect. I may be managing a farm on behalf of the owner. I am a steward. And the time will come when I have to give a report, and look back to see how well I have done the job. For me, whenever I see one of the big buses climbing the hill out of Grahamstown onto the N2, particularly at the end of term, full of students and school children and young people going home for the holidays, I pray for the driver – that he will survive the trip; but also because he is a steward, responsible for all those young lives.

Stewardship means that we are given something to care for, to use, on behalf of others. Christian stewardship means that it is God who has entrusted us with everything that we have; he has given all these gifts to us, for us to use. We are answerable to God for what we do with them. We are called to use our talents so that God's kingdom is extended, God's will be done.

Christian stewardship includes how we care for the environment. It includes how we care for our heritage, our history, how we find a future together. Christian stewardship includes how we use our finances, our money. It is how we use our gifts, our abilities, our skills, our talents, our lives.

## **Talents, gifts, abilities**

Our Gospel reading is the parable of the men with the different number of talents. A talent was a unit of currency, a sum of money. The people in the parable were given different amounts of money, each according to his ability, and sent off to make the most of what they had been given.

The parable ends with a sting in the tale. The time came for the three men to report back. Two had done well – they had doubled the amount entrusted to them. They were duly rewarded. But the third person, the one who had wasted his talent, who had buried it, was condemned. “As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Mt 25:30).

We can think of talents as referring to our skills, gifts, abilities. People are born with different talents. We are good at some things and not at others. The point of the parable is not to bemoan what we do not have, but rather to use to the full the gifts, the abilities, the opportunities, that we have been given.

It is all too easy to compare ourselves with others, to see others excelling in ways we don't; or to think – like the man who had only one talent - that we have nothing to offer, that we have no part to play.

These past 24 hours have seen St Andrew's & DSG pupils, staff and some parents take part in the run in memory of Stuart van Oldenburg (Smiley), a boy who died tragically a year ago. Proceeds raised are going to a local charity. Some organised the event and set it up – you could say that in this situation they were the ones with the five talents. But many just came and ran or walked – offered their one talent. Simply by being there, they made it happen.

We are all gifted with something. Let's use what we have been given. What a difference we can make to the life of the church, to the community, the school, an organisation. Let's never think we have no part to play, no gift or talent to use. But there is more: if we do nothing, if we don't use what we have, the potential for life and growth that is there, will not be realised. We can make a difference – here in the life and ministry of the cathedral. At school. At our place of work. Where we live. Things can be different if we use even our one talent.

Let's use the gifts we have been given, to extend the kingdom of God. Choose life over death (from our first reading). The words of Moses to the people: "Choose life so that you and your descendants may live..." (Deut 30:19).

## **Choose life**

The call today is to choose life – choose the way of God. Dedicate our lives to God in Christ. Respond to God’s call on our life.

Let’s use our talents, abilities, gifts to become the best we can. Choose life. A few weeks ago the world mourned the death of Neil Armstrong, first man on the moon. His famous words, as he stepped onto the surface of the moon: “One small step for man; one giant step for mankind.” A life-time of training and skill and ability, from him and from thousands of researchers and scientists, that led to that achievement. Using his skills and talents, following his dream, choosing life. “Don’t ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go and do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” (Harold Whitman).

But sometimes we must ask what the world needs, what our nation needs, to find life. As we face the crisis of Marikana, what is God’s call for us? “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Choose life. Build a nation in which all can benefit. It is wrong for mine owners and trade union officials and others in strategic posts to enrich themselves, while others earn little, and so many are unemployed. Choose life.

After a visit to Marikana earlier this month, Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba wrote, “[I]t was as if the land spoke deep in my soul, saying, ‘All is not well’. I could not help but fear that we are living in the calm before the storm. We are on a knife edge. The dire states of everything from living conditions to issues in the mining community are the stuff from which revulsion follows and revolution is too easily made... [T]his visit left me with the sense that this country is like a smouldering log that, left unattended, lies ready to ignite at the slightest wind.”<sup>1</sup>

Let us choose life by turning away from using violence. Let’s put aside the fear and hatred that can overwhelm us and control us. Let’s choose life by deciding to build our country’s future by protecting the

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<sup>1</sup> Statement, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2012

powerless and caring for the poor. Let's choose life by how we use power and authority – to build up, to set free, to help and to serve, rather than to oppress, to crush, to bully, to exploit, to destroy.

Let's choose life in how we live out the Gospel of Jesus, the love of God that brings us together. The biggest gift, resource we have is the love and power of God. The love of Christ that has died for us so that we might have life. The power of the Spirit that transforms our lives.

I saw a remarkable picture on Facebook yesterday, a picture of a bridge between Sweden and Denmark, across the sea. Except that it is half under the water. After a while the bridge disappears beneath the water, becomes a tunnel to allow ships to cross overhead, and then re-emerges. The bridge – what we can see – could be a symbol of the public statements that are being made about Marikana and the crisis we face, the commission of enquiry, the action that is to be taken, hopefully, to restore order and calm. But the tunnel, the bit under the surface, out of sight, is the healing power of the Gospel, the hope that we have in Christ, the assurance that nothing can separate us from God's love, the love of God that brings us together. And the tunnel, the bits under the surface, are also the little, daily actions – the courtesy we use with others, the things that build relationships, the lives you and I touch, as we reach out with the love of Christ. Like the tunnel, these things may not get publicity or even recognition, but without the love of Christ in you and in me, the bridge will not reach its goal.

## **CONCLUSION**

God gave his son Jesus Christ to die and to rise again, so that we might have life. Let you and I in turn give ourselves, our time and talents, our lives, so that others may receive life.