November 15th 2026

2nd Sunday before Advent

10.30am Holy Communion at All Saints Oakham

Zephaniah 1.7, 12-e, 1 Thessalonians 5.1-11, Matthew 25.14-20

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer.

This morning's readings have an apocalyptic feel to them as one might expect in the run up to Advent. The first is a rather terrifying description of the "Day of the Lord" and this theme is taken up in Paul's letter to the church at Thessalonia, where, the Day of the Lord is identified as the second coming of Jesus that was described in last week's reading, and stresses the need to be prepared for this event, which will come "like a thief in he night" at the least expected time. The gospel reading is one of the parables that Matthew places just before the narrative of the passion, one of those that describe, in story form, the nature of the Kingdom of God. And it too has a rather sombre theme. It is the well known parable of the talents, where a master before going on a journey gives his slaves varying amounts of money, expressed in terms of talents, which was some sort of currency unit of high value, expecting them to return it to him at a profit, as indeed the majority of them do. And for that they are commended and rewarded But there is one who simply buries his one talent and returns it to his master without profit. And for that he is condemned.

You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest.

This parable has, quite properly, been seen as an encouragement to use whatever time, talents and money that God has given us to do his work, the work of the kingdom. Indeed the way in which we use the word talent, to represent our personal abilities and skills, derives from this parable. And as such it is an absolute gift for any preacher following on from Dick's introduction to Hope into Action. It even talks about investing money! But more than that of course, Mark and John, in their presentations about giving a week or so ago, quite rightly both said that the giving of money was only a part of our stewardship – we also need to consider how and when we use our time and our talents in the service of God and the service of the church. And that wider challenge still stands of course. But if you feel that God has been speaking to you this morning specifically about helping with the Hope into Action work, and perhaps investing time and money there, do talk to him after the service.

But very briefly back to the parable. It ends in a somewhat uncomfortable way.

As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

There is here and indication of judgement, of separation of the good from the bad, those who use their talents and those who don't. And this idea of judgement is again one of those advent themes that we tend not to dwell on, as it is far from comfortable. Next week's parable, of the King addressing the groups identified as the sheep and the goats, is even more stark, with the notion of judgement based on actions clearly set out. Now we need to be careful – these are parables, not precise descriptions of how we will be judged, and our God is a merciful God, and we can be sure that his judgements will be just and merciful. To quote the old hymn,

There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in His justice
which is more than liberty.

But nonetheless, scripture is clear, that there will be some ultimate accounting for how we have used our time and talents, and uncomfortable as it might be, we need to reflect on this issue, to be prepared for the coming Day of the Lord, the Day that will come like a thief in the night.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen