

## Stewardship of time and talents

Alfred Nobel, the Swedish chemist, engineer and inventor dedicated much of his life to the manufacture of arms. And indeed he was very good at it, inventing dynamite and amassing a vast fortune.

Sadly one day, his brother died in France, and in error, published Alfred's obituary.

Alfred was horrified to see the headline, "the merchant of death is dead – Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday".

Horrified that this was to be his legacy, Alfred re-wrote his will, leaving his vast fortune to found the Noble Prizes, one of which is of course for peace.

As part of a course I once took, I was encouraged to write my own obituary.

Yes, I know it sounds morbid, but it is incredibly useful to ask the question, "What has my life been worth?" and "For what will I be remembered?"

For pondering how we will be remembered might well help us to shape how we live today.

For the truth of the matter is, God gives each of us a certain number of days on this earth, and he gives us talents to use; and the question is, how are we going to use them... or invest them?

In our gospel reading today, Jesus tells the story (parable) of a man who is going on a journey. He gives three slaves 5 talents, 2 talents and 1 talent of money according to their ability and leaves.

On his return he calls the slaves to give an account.

The two slaves who have invested their talents and made more are praised as being good and trustworthy and rewarded with greater responsibility.

The third slave who in fear has simply buried his share of the man's money, doing nothing with it, is rebuked and thrown into outer darkness.

The moral of Jesus' story is clear: God has given each of us life (time), talents, and resources. And he expects us to invest the time, talents and resources he has entrusted to us productively.

Now at this point we may become a little uncomfortable.

After all, isn't it my life? Isn't it up to me to do what I want with it?

I do my bit for God, but really I have other responsibilities too!

But this way of thinking misses the point completely.

I wonder if you've ever pondered another of Jesus' parables – the parable of the vineyard workers.

A man wants people to work in his vineyard and goes at dawn to the town square and hires workers for a denarius. He goes back at various points during the day and hires anyone who is available.

At the end of the day, all the workers, irrespective of how many hours they have put in receive a denarius.

Those who have worked longest are miffed; but the vineyard owner says, "I have been fair – you have been paid what you agreed to work for! But I'm at liberty to be generous if I wish and I've been generous to those who didn't have the opportunity to work for so long."

Whenever it was that we became Christians, we promised to love God, with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. We promised to serve him.

We knew the deal.

And in the words of American pastor John Wimber when we pledged ourselves to Christ, we became "lose change in God's pocket, to do with as he likes".

In the words of John Wesley from the Covenant service two weeks ago, "I am no longer my own, but yours".

Now, we might think, this doesn't sound much fun.

But we would be wrong.

Think of the parable of the prodigal son.

The older brother gets upset when his younger brother returns and his father showers him with gifts.

"All I have is yours" says the father to his older son.

Being a servant of the living God is the most high privilege any of us could ever imagine.

But more than that, Jesus says that when we pledge ourselves to him, we become friends of God.

There is nothing better in life that we could be.

Yes, living not as our own, but God's can be a challenge; it will sometimes be hard.

But it is the highest honour, the most exciting adventure, the most thrilling journey, the most loving of relationships we could ever imagine.

So, how might we invest our lives; our time, our talents and our resources in a way that is pleasing to God?

Well, we could do worse than to go back to Jesus' summary of the Law: to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and then love our neighbour as ourselves.

We must put God first in our lives;