

If you were a musical instrument, what musical instrument would you like to be?

And what sort of music, or song, would you want to play?

This week in the car I was listening to Radio 4, and I caught a snippet of a programme in which a violinist was being interviewed, and she was talking about her violin. It was beautifully made, the work of a master craftsman. She said it had been made in 1850, and violins get better as they age, and the more they are played. She said they mellow and gain a richness and a resonance, and it's almost as if they come alive as you play them. If you leave a violin and don't play it for a few weeks, or months, or years, it becomes rigid and brittle. She said it 'dies' if it isn't played.

Her conversation and comments reminded me of a beautiful reflection by Ellie Hart, in which she describes a beautiful violin, a work of art, designed and created with a specific task in mind. The instrument is beautiful in its own right, and yet until it is resting on the shoulder of the master musician, and surrendering to the tune that he chooses to play, it can never achieve its full potential.

The reflection goes on, "So often we fight back, unable to trust and rest, unwilling to surrender to the tune the master wants to play with our lives. While we are wrestling, we are still beautiful, still the work of the master craftsman, still treasured by him. But when we rest on his shoulder and he turns his face to us and lifts his bow – then we become what we were always intended to be."

And I think there is something of that same message in our gospel reading today.

In Jesus story of the talents, three servants were each given significant sums of money, in accordance with their ability, and the master clearly expected them to do something with what they had been given.

When he returns the two who have used their talents for their master are rewarded for their trustworthiness. Both are commended with a, "Well done good and faithful servant", welcomed into the master's presence, and their faithfulness is rewarded with honour and further responsibility.

But the third servant never wanted to play the master's tune. He clearly doesn't like the master. He has been

given a talent – a trust – but chooses to bury it. He uses fear as an excuse for having done nothing with what he was given.

Fear always stifles human potential. Fear of rebuke, or rejection, or fear of failure, stops people from taking risks, having a go at things, making discoveries about what they can or can't do.

On the whole, children who are affirmed and encouraged to try things grow up with a greater sense of adventure and self-belief. And it's not just children. When I was a curate my training vicar wrote in my learning agreement, "I will encourage Penny to take risks and I will allow her to fail." He didn't want fear of failure to stop me from trying new things, or stepping out of my comfort zone. He wanted me to offer all that I was to God, to experiment, work out what my strengths and weaknesses were, and especially to discover and exercise the gifts God had given me.

And we are far more likely to take risks for God and to serve God him confidently and wholeheartedly if we have the right image of God in our heads. If we know deep in our hearts how dearly he loves us, how he takes delight in us, how much he loves it when we come to him and talk

to him, share our joys and concerns with him as a child does with a trusted parent.

When we know God like that, and surrender joyfully to his Lordship in our lives, we find a freedom in our worship and service. We don't serve out of duty, we serve out of joy and gratitude.

That's the kind of freedom King David had.

Last week we heard how David was so happy and thankful to God that he started to dance, in a very undignified way. We're told he worshipped the Lord with all his might. The Bible tells us his heart was 'after God's own heart' – in other words he loved God, he wanted to know God better, and he wanted the desires of his own heart to be in line with the desires of God's heart.

This week our readings show David setting up a worship group with instrumentalists - harps, lyres, cymbals - singers. Don't let anyone ever tell you that drums and guitars aren't appropriate in church! Chenaniah was appointed a music director, because he understood music, and the musicians were chosen because they were gifted and played skilfully.

David knew that God was worthy of praise, and he made sure gifted people were appointed to lead the whole people of God praise and worship.

How does any of this apply to us this morning?

I want to encourage you to offer all that you are, the gifts and abilities you have been given, to serve God, our heavenly master – or rather, our heavenly Father. We are children of God, not slaves, and Jesus called us his brothers and sisters. He loves us and wants us to enjoy working with him.

We have different gifts and abilities – some of us may be one talent people, some two talent, others five talents, that doesn't matter – what matters is how we are using what God has entrusted to us.

If you have musical gifts, I'd love to encourage you to offer them to our worship groups. Len and Helen are both open to having more instrumentalists involved in leading worship, and we are going to organise some 'Come and Play' sessions, where anyone can come along and have a go. That does mean being able to count time and sing or play reasonably in tune, but anyone can come and have a go.

Others of us may not have musical gifts, but we can still be involved in the worship by reading, praying, as sidepeople, welcomers, helping in Sunday Club, counting the collection, or making tea and coffee.

And our worship isn't confined to Sundays. We serve God all week in the community, as we love and serve those around us.

And one of the greatest acts of service we can do for God, and for our neighbours, is to invite them to an event where they can discover for themselves how much Jesus loves them.

I am so thankful to my college friends who had the courage to invite me to a talk where I could hear about Jesus.

Who might come to Café Church because you put a flyer through their door? Or who could you personally invite to Café Church? To the Harvest lunch? To a Carol Service? To our Remembering a Loved one service? Or who could you invite to Alpha? A free meal, excellent company, a good quality dvd and a chance to ask the big questions in life that we don't often get a chance to ask.

So, thinking back to that violin reflection at the beginning,
two questions to ponder,

Are you resting on the shoulder of the master musician?

Are you allowing him to play the tune that he wants to
play?

A short reflective prayer to finish with:

I rest here on your shoulder

Confident in you, my maker, my friend.

I rest here on your shoulder,

Laying down my right to wield the bow or write the tune.

I rest here,

At peace, assured,

Knowing that the song you have in mind for me

Will be the one my heart was made to sing.

(Taken from Ellie Hart, Postcards from heaven).