

Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church
955 Main St.
Barboursville, West Virginia 25504
November 8, 2020

Prelude

Call to Worship Psalm 78

Let us open our minds to God's teaching;
and tune our ear to God's word.

Let us listen to the stories of the faith of our ancestors;
and share our stories with our children.

We put our trust in God.

We worship the One who gives us life.

Prayer of the Day

God of heaven and earth, God of sunrise and sunset, God of the highest mountain and the deepest valley, hear our prayers as we come before you. Declare your message to us and grant us the courage to listen. May our listening turn to action. May our actions touch the hearts of those who need to hear your voice. We live today and every day confident of your everlasting presence, care, and love. Amen.

Hymn Thy Word Is a Lamp Unto My Feet Text: Amy Grant; Music: Michael W. Smith, 1984

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto thy path.

When I feel afraid, and I think I've lost my way, still you're there right beside me.

Nothing will I fear as long as you are near.

Please be near me to the end. Repeat.

Readings from Scripture

Joshua 24:14-24

Matthew 25:1-13

The Morning Message

“As for me and my house, we will love the Lord.”

This beautiful cross stitch has been in my office ever since I was ordained. It was a gift from a friend and former member of the church I served for almost twenty-five years. The needle work is lovely, and the Bible verse is one by which my friend lives. She is a ruling elder, but, truth be told, she is a minister, living out her calling as a therapist, working with people caught in the real hell of drug and alcohol abuse, giving them hope and courage to begin the life-long commitment to recovery. This sets them on the path to be reconciled to God and loved ones.

In many churches, this is stewardship season. It was during last year's stewardship season that I first joined you as your pastor-to-be. That special dinner, held every year around Thanksgiving, is a time to come together and consider all God has given us, now and eternally, and how we might return to God what is God's- our time, our gifts, and our money.

Because of the pandemic, the church is doing lots of things differently, including stewardship campaigns. It is a quiet one this year. We are missing a delicious fellowship meal and the joy of one another's company. But we are not without hope. We know that we will be together one day to break bread and catch up.

Until and beyond that time, the mission and ministry of Kuhn Memorial continues. The question still remains: How shall I respond to God's love and care for me? For my family? For my church? How do I thank God for this life of blessing, even in these challenging times?

In our Old Testament reading, Joshua preaches, what pastor Peter Wallace calls "a barnburner of a stewardship sermon." Joshua declares to the Israelites, "If you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve." In other words, if you won't serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then go right ahead and choose the idol of your fancy. "But, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

And what do the people do? They shout, "Yes! Yes! We will serve the Lord!"

But then Joshua tests them: "You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God, a jealous God. If you forsake the Lord and serve idols, then God will turn and do you harm..."

The message apparently finds its mark because the people reply, "No, we will serve the Lord!"

We Presbyterians avoid talking about "sinners in the hands of an angry God." We don't urge giving as fire insurance. Instead, we focus on God's love and grace and providence. We believe stewardship touches all aspects of our lives. How we spend our time, how we care for our homes and vehicles, how we educate our children are all a matter of stewardship.

In our gospel reading, Jesus tells the parable of the bridesmaids. Now, I officiated a wedding recently. It was a beautiful day, full of joy and hope and dancing and a bountiful feast. The sun was high in the azure October sky. Color was all around the outdoor setting. If the wedding party ran out of anything, we'll never know. It seemed pretty flawless to me.

In the Matthew text, we are at a wedding. A number of young women are awaiting the groom's arrival. When he arrives, they will accompany him to the bride's home. That was the custom. Apparently he watched the game too long and got a late start to the ceremony. The delay had an

impact on the bridesmaids. Some of the girls had extra oil and could keep their lamps burning, but some packed light for this event and they ran out.

So, the “foolish” ones run out to the mall to buy more oil. When they return, the party has started, the door is shut, and they miss out.

Now, we usually hear this story in judgmental terms, in reference to Christ’s ultimate return to judge the living and the dead. But, borrowing again from Peter Wallace, let’s reframe this story a bit.

He suggests that Jesus may be setting us up in this story. We are so anxious to get the point that we miss it. This parable is more than who has oil and who does not. Who meets the groom when he arrives late for his own party, and who is running errands. It’s about more than who gets into the wedding and who the bouncer sends packing.

Wallace suggests it’s a story of relationships. He says sometimes we’re so distracted by our lamps and our oil, the height of the grass in our front yard, the hundred Zoom links we have to juggle to keep up with our classes in Covid Academy, that we focus on the “doing” in life, the busyness and duties, that neglect the “being.” We cross tasks off a list, and we’re good at it, but in the process, we sacrifice our relationships.

Some questions are raised in this text that are never answered. Like, why was the groom so late? That seems disrespectful to the bride and her family. Why didn’t the girls who had oil to spare not share it? Why did the others go shopping when they knew they ran the risk of missing the groom? And, why would a host be so offended that he would slam the door in the faces of some teenage girls who misjudged the supplies they needed to participate in a wedding tradition?

We can get so obsessed with our obligations that we forget to take care of ourselves. A friend of mine once said she had gotten so tied up with the care of her kids, checking their school work, and getting them to the doctor for flu shots, that she hadn’t visited the bathroom all day. I know, I could have kept that to myself. But, the point is, we should never find ourselves so busy that we fail to care for the body we’ve been given, for it is God’s masterpiece, too.

We may read this story differently at another time, but, for today, this is my take on it. We all have lamps and oil. It doesn’t matter how much oil we have, or how plentiful our resources are or aren’t. What matters is receiving and using our gifts as expressions of our gratitude for grace given.

During these stressful days, those expressions may be found in loving and supporting one another while we are apart. This is one way we can live out Joshua’s words, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Prayers of the Faithful and the Lord's Prayer

Blessing

Go now and follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before us in Christ.

Love the Lord.

Serve God in sincerity and faithfulness.

Teach those who come after you to trust in God.

And may God protect you along the way;

May Christ Jesus keep you alert and prepared.

And may the Holy Spirit fuel the lamp that guides your path.

Postlude