

Worship for Nov.12, 2023

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

*Call to Worship

Come and worship, you who love the Lord with all your heart,
and with all our souls, and all our minds, and all our strength.

Come into the community of God's people and worship with the neighbor you do not know:
**the stranger seeking welcome,
the hungry, the homeless, the hurting.**

Come, and worship, you who love the spirit of the law,
and the One who showed us how to live in kin-dom.

Prayer for Veterans

Holy and loving God, we give you thanks for the veterans among us, those living, and the saints who have gone before. Thank you for their service and sacrifice. We thank you for those now serving and ask your protection over them and their loved ones.

Guide us, Lord, as we seek to love our neighbors who are veterans and deal honorably with them. Heal all brokenness and bring us together as your people.

Lead us to work together toward your promised reign, when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, and neither shall we learn war anymore. Amen.

*Hymn 336 We Gather Together to Ask the Lord's Blessing

Prayer of Confession

**O God, Rock of our salvation,
you give children to the barren,
and strength to the feeble.**

You exalt the poor and lift up the needy.

**We praise you from morning to night,
yet we build walls that separate us from you,
from one another,
and from the world.**

We place stumbling blocks in the way of goodness and truth.

We are led astray by promises of earthly desires.

We confess our failings,

and seek solace in the source of our joy, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Guide us in our efforts
to encourage one another,**

**to work together for good in the world you made,
and to prepare for the coming day of the Lord. Amen.**

Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me as I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

Our hearts are sprinkled clean with the water of God's love.

Through salvation won for us by Jesus Christ, God assures us that we are forgiven, absolved, and released from the sin that binds us. Alleluia! Amen.

First Reading Psalm 78:1-7

Time With Our Young Disciples

Second Reading Matthew 25:1-13

Morning Message

I have been singing an old spiritual all week:

Keep your lamps trimmed and burning,

keep your lamps trimmed and burning,

keep your lamps trimmed and burning,

the time is drawing nigh.

In these simple lines, you hear and feel an urgency. Something very significant is anticipated and you wouldn't want to miss it.

Rev. Janet Hunt offers this story from her childhood. I think it gives us a glimpse of what is meant by this parable.

"I was in third grade. Our classroom was on the second floor. There were two entries into that classroom. The one we normally used and the one we used for recess. The one we used for recess was actually an old iron fire escape. Without a key, the door only opened from the inside.

It was afternoon in the fall of the year, and we were outside for recess. Normally, I would have been playing with friends in my own class, but the second grade class was having recess at the same time that day. My sister, Martha, was in that class and I got to playing with her. When I looked up again, my class was gone.

Now ours was a new teacher, and no doubt, she was still learning how to best corral the energy of 40 eight and nine year olds. Her method for gathering our attention and signaling it was time to go back to our lessons, was to stand in the middle of the playground and hold one hand in the air. We were to make a single file line in front of her and she would lead us inside.

I was not the first one to miss it. In fact, just a week before two boys had gotten busy and had not looked up at the right moment. When they realized they had missed it, they went around to the school's front doors and came in. She sent them back outside and ordered them to sit at the top of the fire escape steps until the end of the school day.

That day was my turn. I ran as quickly as my nine year old legs would take me to the top of the stairs. I peered through the window to see my classmates taking off their coats and hanging them on their assigned hooks. I saw our teacher tell them to ignore me...not to open the door to let me in. By the example of others, I knew it would do no good to enter by another way. I was something like those foolish bridesmaids we hear about today. And so I sat on those top steps and waited until the end of the day and I was finally let in.

I was told to sit down at my desk where our teacher told me to make up the work I had missed. I will never understand her surprise that by now I was choking back tears.

I offer this now because it ends in a similar way to the parable Jesus tells today. Recalling my third grade experience of being locked out helps me test the point Jesus offers now.

But here is my struggle with the words before us today. While the words of the parable end with Jesus telling his listeners to "keep awake," my sense is that is not really his point. At least not in the way we might normally understand it. For as the story is told, both the wise and foolish girls fell asleep. So it seems to me that "keeping awake" must not be that of a third grader keeping her eyes glued to her teacher so as not to miss her silent signal. But this keeping awake does have to do with being prepared...always aware that the end of "recess" is right around the corner...that the bridegroom could come at any time."

I agree with her statements. In that way, the waiting has a joyful and life-affirming purpose. That does not seem to be the objective of the new third grade teacher, who was conducting her class in a way that turned punitive if one missed her hand in the air.

Jesus is expected...even if he is delayed. And somehow our living should reflect that. I confess, this is a subject on which I rarely focus. Life is good and life is short. I have always known the love of Jesus and the grace he has lavished on me for over sixty years...through good times and bad...through tragedy and heartache, and yes, in times of temptation and sin. I don't doubt his presence today. I think very little about the eschaton, or the second advent of Christ.

But, each and every Sunday, we stand together and profess our faith that points to a realm beyond this one, where the whole creation is redeemed and we shall see our Savior, Jesus Christ, face to face.

So, what do Presbyterians believe about "end things?"

This is a very complicated subject and the topic of prolific volumes of Christian thought through the ages. In an attempt to simplify things, the Presbyterian Mission Agency offers this explanation:

“The Jesus story is also our story. That Jesus died, was raised, ascended into heaven, and sits on God’s right hand, prefigures our own story. We will follow him. This means our confessions often describe the future of individual Christians by how they tell the story of Jesus. In the earliest confessions it is understood that we are destined, when we die, to follow Jesus into God’s presence.

If there is a Presbyterian narrative about life after death, this is it: When you die, your soul goes to be with God, where it enjoys God’s glory and waits for the final judgment. At the final judgment, bodies are reunited with souls, and eternal rewards and punishments are handed out. As the Scots Confession notes, final judgment is also “the time of refreshing and restitution of all things.”

The core meaning of the Greek word for faith is “trust.” Each section of one of our contemporary affirmations, A Brief Statement of Faith, begins with the words, “We trust.” As we trust God with our present, we can trust God with our future.

A friend of mine was born and raised in a Jewish family. He was faithful. When he went to college, he met a young woman who was Christian. He eventually came to claim the Christian faith himself. He told me that he went to tell his beloved mother that he was becoming a Christian. To which his mother simply said, “Then you be a good one.”

I believe that our call is not to fully articulate what the end times will look, sound, or feel like, but to trust both the present and the future to God, a God that would never leave you quivering on the fire escape.

*Hymn 314 Longing for Light, We Wait in Darkness (Christ, Be Our Light) verses 1-3

*Affirmation of Faith The Apostles’ Creed

*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Prayers of the People and the Lord’s Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

*Hymn 607 Doxology

*Prayer of Dedication

*Hymn 314 Longing for Light, We Wait in Darkness (Christ, Be Our Light) verses 4 and 5

*Blessing

Go out in peace, for the Lord has heard your prayers.

Do not allow anyone to lead you astray.

Hold fast to the hope you have claimed.

Continue to meet together, encouraging one another and provoking one another to put love into action.

And may God be your rock of strength.

May Christ Jesus usher you into God's presence.

And may the Holy Spirit write the laws of love and life upon your hearts. Amen.

*Postlude