

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2020

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 70)*

One: Rejoice and be glad!
All: For God is our salvation.
One: Rejoice and be glad!
All: For God is great.

OPENING HYMN "Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart!" GtG 804

One: Rejoice, ye pure in heart!
All: Rejoice, give thanks, and sing!
One: Your festal banner wave on high,
All: The cross of Christ your King.
One: Rejoice!
All: Rejoice!
Unison: Rejoice, give thanks, and sing!

One: With voice as full and strong as
ocean's surging praise,
**All: send forth the sturdy hymns of old,
the psalms of ancient days.**
Unison: Rejoice!

One: Yes, on through life's long path,
All: still chanting as ye go,
One: from youth to age, by night and day,
All: in gladness and in woe:
Unison: Rejoice, give thanks, and sing!

One: At last the march shall end;
the wearied ones shall rest;
**All: the pilgrims find their home at last,
Jerusalem the blest.**
Unison: Rejoice!

One: Then on, ye pure in heart!
All: Rejoice, give thanks, and sing!
One: Your festal banner wave on high,
All: The cross of Christ your King.
One: Rejoice!
All: Rejoice!
Unison: Rejoice, give thanks, and sing!

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We sing of your reign, O Lord, but our lives fall short of demonstrating our commitment to you. We are blind to your presence among us. We are deaf to your call to serve. We are mute in response to your glory. Forgive us, O Lord. Touch us by your mercy and fill us with your grace, that we might celebrate your life among us and give ourselves to you. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Sisters and brothers,
rejoice and be glad,
for God is mighty to save
and comes to you in peace
to forgive, restore, and strengthen you
eternally in Christ.
All: Thanks be to God!

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.
All: And also with you.
(From your place, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 25:1-13

MATTHEW 25:1-13 (Today's English Version/Good News Bible +)

¹ *“At that time the Kingdom of heaven will be like this. Once there were ten young women who took their oil lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and the other five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not*

take any extra oil with them,⁴ while the wise ones took containers full of oil for their lamps.⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶ “It was already midnight when the cry rang out, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come and meet him!’⁷ The ten young women woke up and prepared their lamps.⁸ Then the foolish ones said to the wise ones, ‘Let us have some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.’⁹ ‘No, indeed,’ the wise ones answered, ‘there is not enough for you and for us. Go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’¹⁰ So the foolish ones went off to buy some oil; and while they were gone, the bridegroom arrived. The five who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was closed.

¹¹ “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’¹² But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’

¹³ “Therefore keep alert, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Wise? or Foolish? or Simply Low on Fuel?” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Like lines for voting -- whether this past Tuesday or before -- winding their way around the corner and down the street; like lines for virus testing, with cars snaking through the parking lot and down the street...

...so does this line wind and snake and weave through the village, with equal urgency and purpose -- though maybe not a dire urgency, but a joyous one.

For this line is the wedding procession through the village. The bridegroom has gone to fetch his bride. When he picks her up, they begin their procession through the village back to his house for the wedding. The procession meanders up and down streets and alleys so that all in the town may wish them well and join in the celebration. This procession may take a while.

Meanwhile, the ten young women await the arrival of the procession at the bridegroom's house. They know the joy. They know the sense of anticipation. And they know the waiting.

We know about waiting. Waiting in the doctor's office. Waiting in the check-out line. Waiting for a phone call.

And we know something about anticipating something joyous and wonderful. Like waiting for the birth of a child...or a grandchild.

Yes, we do know of waiting.

And sometimes we know about a deeper waiting, a darker waiting, when we hear of wars and rumors of wars: when we hear of wars with mental illness and wars over gun rights and court wars in battleground states.

And we cry out, with others, “How long, O Lord?”

“How long?” indeed.

We don't know.

Yes, we do know of waiting.
And of delay.

As Matthew wrote his gospel, he addressed it to a community that was waiting.
The early church knew of delay and waiting, expecting the 'immediate' return of Christ.
And then the reality: delay. What to do?

With this story and others the community is reminded of the importance of being prepared, always.

A point that is made very pointedly, for the 'foolish' women did not have "*containers full of oil for their lamps*"; they were not prepared for the crucial moment: the one they had anticipated, the one they had looked forward to with joy.

And so they are left out -- left out in the dark.

Some would suggest that, as we reflect on this story, the question now is,

Are you foolish? (not prepared)

-or-

Are you wise? (yes, prepared)

And all too often, people (especially those of us in the church) see that question (those questions) as an invitation to separate into categories -- 'I'm wise, you're foolish' -- pointing fingers at others, judging.

But could it be, as we reflect on this story and its significance for us, that there is another question to ask? One just as pointed, yet more instructive, and enlightening.

Barbara K. Lundblad, retired Professor of Preaching at Union Theological Seminary, New York, New York, invites us to hear the story, with a twist:

Let us start over, then, without labeling the women before the story unfolds. "Ten young women took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. As they walked together they asked one another, 'Did you bring extra oil? You know it could be a long night!'"

And then Lundblad asks,

Can the church be a community where we help one another through the long days and nights of waiting? Can we ask one another, "What do you need to keep going?"

...Instead of labeling one another wise or foolish, can we enter this parable together, asking what oil we need to keep the light of faith burning?

(Feasting on the Gospels, Matthew, Volume 2, Chapters 14-28, p.259)

Waiting is hard.

To be always prepared, alert and ready, can be exhausting, and we can burn through our oil reserves quickly, and be left drained, anxious, and out in the dark.

Maybe the question is not so much, 'Who among us is wise and who is foolish?'

Maybe the question is: What does it look like to be wise?

What does it mean to be prepared? Prepared for the coming of the Lord, whether that be at the end of time or the end of my time or in the midst of this time, here, now, today.

What does it mean to discern God's coming and work, and respond appropriately: obediently, lovingly, and even, yes, when necessary, patiently.

And what then do I need in order to be so prepared? What is the oil, the fuel I need to be prepared to respond faithfully?

Do I need prayer? Not only learning how to pray and practicing prayer and praying for you, but also having you pray for me.

Do I need guidance from others? Having conversations -- holy conversations -- with one another, where you share your journey and I share mine and we learn from each other.

Do I need to pick up the Bible, open it, and actually read it? Listening for God's voice, seeking to hear God speak to me.

What do we need for 'oil'-- 'fuel' -- to help us in our waiting in order to remain ever faithful and always prepared? Alert to God's presence whenever and wherever we discern it. Ready for God's working in our midst whenever and wherever God needs us.

What are the things ('oil') that we might need to keep the light of faith burning?

Do we need community, whether actually physically present or otherwise: help and support from one another, fellowship with each other, to encourage and to assure one another.

Do we need silence: to have the time, to make the time, to be given the time away from the noise around us -- the cacophony of voices that vie for our attention -- that we might actually be able to hear God whisper to us.

Do we need opportunities to serve others: to practice love and support, to be of service to one another. For even as we give, we receive -- and we are fed. And isn't that what we're talking about: how we are fed in our faith that we might be strong in the difficult times and persevere in the waiting.

What oil do you need to keep the light of faith burning?

Will we name that need?

Will we claim that need?

Will we make an effort to obtain what we need?

It is important to affirm, as several do, that whatever it is that we need as oil is not something that we can borrow from someone else. This is crucial to the movement of the story - - i.e., the wise young women were not being selfish.

I think of study groups in college. Study groups can be a great way to learn and to prepare for the next test. But, unless *I* am willing to pay attention and *I* make the effort to learn, being in the best study group in the world will do nothing for *my* preparation.

Kenneth Bailey notes:

The faithful borrow many things from each other. But they cannot borrow their own preparations for the coming of the kingdom. Commitment and the discipleship that follows can be neither loaned nor borrowed. (Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes, 274)

The oil is something I need to get, or have, myself.

At the same time, is it possible to ask, 'How can I help you get what you need?' Might it even be useful, or helpful, to point out to you the 'store' where you can stock up on the oil -- the fuel, the resources -- you need?

If you need prayer, perhaps together we can learn to pray, and I can pray for you and you can pray for me.

If you need to open the Bible and read it and study it, could we not do that together, and teach and learn and listen together?

If you need an opportunity to serve, maybe we could take each other by the hand and go and do that together.

And in the end, helping someone with their fuel might just be what I need to build up my own 'oil reserves'.

Always recognizing my need to be sustained for faithfulness, my need for preparedness in waiting, my need to keep alert...which takes focus and energy to be active in being prepared, to be active in being alert, to be active in waiting.

Several sources note a tie-in with the Sermon on the Mount. You remember the Sermon on the Mount: Jesus' teaching, sharing the Beatitudes, deeper interpretations of the Law, and such.

Near the end he says,

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. [For] many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord...' [and] I will declare to them, 'I never knew you...'" (Matthew 7:21-23-nrsv)

Sound familiar? Like the foolish young women who bang on the door to be admitted to the wedding, calling out, 'Lord, Lord', and the response from within is, 'I do not know you'.

Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount with these words:

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine..."

--'these words of mine': like the Sermon on the Mount, like all the words he taught and shared that speak of a way to embrace and a path to follow and a life to live--

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts of them will be like a wise [person] who built [their] house on rock. [And the winds came and the rain fell, and the house stood firm.] And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish [person] who built [their] house on sand. [And the winds came and the rain fell...and the house fell. And great was the fall of it.]" (Matthew 7:24-27-nrsv)

I can tell you, having watched the digging and setting and pouring of the foundation at the construction site of the house where we will be living, building a house on rock takes work, takes effort, takes energy, takes fuel.

Are you low on fuel?

Are you running low on your reserves of fuel for life, for faith, for love, for hope, for waiting.

What oil do you need to keep the light of faith burning?

Yes, we have responsibility for our own fuel.

At the same time, how can we help one another with each one's low fuel reserves? And in doing so, build up our own.

Will we be a community where we help one another through the long days and nights of faithful waiting?

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**We trust in Jesus Christ,
fully human, fully God.
Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:
preaching good news to the poor
and release to the captives,
teaching by word and deed
and blessing the children,
healing the sick
and binding up the brokenhearted,
eating with outcasts,
forgiving sinners,
and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.
Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,
Jesus was crucified,
suffering the depths of human pain
and giving his life for the sins of the world.
God raised this Jesus from the dead,
vindicating his sinless life,
breaking the power of sin and evil,
delivering us from death to life eternal.**

(from *A Brief Statement of Faith*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: Eternal God,...

People: ...hear our prayer.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (*Contemporary*)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**O great and loving God,
we give you thanks for your extravagant blessings,
and for the love for justice and the gift of generosity
you have given your faithful people.
Bless the gifts we offer and with them reveal your righteousness
as we await the coming of your peace. Amen.**

SENDING

CLOSING HYMN "Rejoice! Rejoice, Believers" GtG 362

One: Rejoice! Rejoice, believers,
and let your lights appear;

All: **the evening is advancing
and darker night is near.**

One: The Bridegroom is arising
and soon he will draw nigh.

All: **Up, watch with expectation;
at midnight comes the cry.**

One: See that your lamps are burning;

All: replenish them with oil;

One: look now for your salvation,

All: the end of sin and toil.

One: The marriage feast is waiting;

All: the gates wide open stand;

One: arise, O heirs of glory;

All: the Bridegroom is at hand!

One: Our hope and expectation,

O Jesus, now appear;

**All: arise, thou Sun so longed for,
above this shadowed sphere!**

One: With hearts and hands uplifted,

**All: we plead, O Lord, to see
the day of earth's redemption,**

Unison: and ever be with thee!

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CHARGE AND BLESSING

Pastor: ...And let the gathered people of God say...

People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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