

Bethlehem Lutheran Church Wagga Wagga

24th Sunday after Pentecost

15th November, 2020

The Triune God meets with us

Since we belong to the day, let us be sober,
**and put on the breastplate of faith and love,
and for a helmet the hope of salvation.** (1 Thess 5:8 NRSV)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

We confess our sins to God the Father...

Friends in Christ:

Let us confess our sins in the presence of God and of each other.

We confess to you, almighty God, before the whole company of heaven, and to each other, that we have sinned in thought, word and deed, by our own fault. Have mercy on us, for Jesus' sake, forgive us all our sins, and bring us to eternal life. Amen.

...and God forgives us

May the almighty and merciful Lord grant us pardon and forgiveness of all our sins.

Amen.

We meditate on the hymn 'My God accept my heart this day'

1. My God, accept my heart this day,
and make it always thine,
that I from thee no more may stray,
no more from thee decline.
2. Before the cross of him who died,
behold, I prostrate fall;
let every sin be crucified,
and Christ be all in all.
3. Anoint me with thy heavenly grace,
and seal me for thine own;

that I may run this earthly race,
in thy strong eyes alone.

4. Let every thought and work and word
to thee be ever given:
Then life shall be thy service, Lord,
and death the gate of heaven.

Matthew Bridges
1800-94 alt
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Jesus leads us as we pray

The Lord be with you
And also with you.

Let us pray to be ready for Christ's return. [silence]

**Help us, Lord Jesus Christ, to wait for you, to wish for you, and to watch for you,
so that when you come again you will find us ready. For you live and reign with
the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

1st Reading – God speaks through his prophets

Zephaniah 1:7,12-18 *The day of the Lord is near*

⁷ Be silent before the Sovereign Lord,
for the day of the Lord is near.

The Lord has prepared a sacrifice;
he has consecrated those he has invited.

¹² At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps
and punish those who are complacent,
who are like wine left on its dregs,
who think, 'The Lord will do nothing,
either good or bad.'

¹³ Their wealth will be plundered,
their houses demolished.

Though they build houses,
they will not live in them;
though they plant vineyards,
they will not drink the wine."

¹⁴ The great day of the Lord is near—
near and coming quickly.

The cry on the day of the Lord is bitter;

the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry.

¹⁵ That day will be a day of wrath—
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of trouble and ruin,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and blackness—

¹⁶ a day of trumpet and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the corner towers.

¹⁷ “I will bring such distress on all people
that they will grope about like those who are blind,
because they have sinned against the Lord.

Their blood will be poured out like dust
and their entrails like dung.

¹⁸ Neither their silver nor their gold
will be able to save them
on the day of the Lord’s wrath.”

In the fire of his jealousy
the whole earth will be consumed,
for he will make a sudden end
of all who live on the earth.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

We respond with Psalm 90:1-12

¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place
throughout all generations.

² Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the whole world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

**Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.** (Ps 90:12)

³ You turn people back to dust,
saying, “Return to dust, you mortals.”

⁴ A thousand years in your sight

are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night.

⁵ Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—
they are like the new grass of the morning:

⁶ In the morning it springs up new,
but by evening it is dry and withered.

**Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.** (Ps 90:12)

⁷ We are consumed by your anger
and terrified by your indignation.

⁸ You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your presence.

**Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.** (Ps 90:12)

⁹ All our days pass away under your wrath;
we finish our years with a moan.

¹⁰ Our days may come to seventy years,
or eighty, if our strength endures;
yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,
for they quickly pass, and we fly away.

¹¹ If only we knew the power of your anger!

**Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.** (Ps 90:12)

Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.

¹² Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

**Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.** (Ps 90:12)

2nd Reading – God speaks through his apostles

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 *Be ready for the Lord's coming*

¹ Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you,
² for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.
³ While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.
⁴ But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵ You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶ So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹ For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Gospel Reading – God speaks through Jesus

Matthew 25:14-30 *The parable of the talents*

¹⁴ “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

²¹ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²² “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

²³ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been

faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!

²⁴ "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'

²⁸ "So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for entrusting each of us with various gifts.

Help us to be faithful servants. Amen.

Children's Message

MAIN POINT

Using our God given gifts

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' (Matthew 25:21)

AIDS

Have copies of this scripture verse on cards or small slips of paper and get the children to hand them out during the address.

ADDRESS

What is a talent?

e.g. something you can do well, singing, running, cooking, reading, talking

How and where are you using the talents God gave you to serve him? What and

who helps us use our talents?

e.g. having somewhere to use them, having someone encourage you to use them, someone mentoring us who has similar talents

We have lots of people in our congregation who use their God-given gifts and talents either here in our church or in our community. Today we are going to thank them and encourage them to keep using their gifts. We are going to hand out these Bible verses to them and as you hand it to them can you say 'well done good and faithful servant'.

PRAYER

Lord God, teach us to wisely use all the time we have, help us to be faithful servants who make the most of your gifts. Amen.

We meditate on the song 'Let us talents and tongues employ'

1. Let us talents and tongues employ,
reaching out with a shout of joy;
bread is broken, the wine is poured,
Christ is spoken and seen and heard.

Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!
Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!

2. Christ is able to make us one;
at his table he sets the tone,
teaching people to live to bless,
love in word and in deed express.

Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!
Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!

3. Jesus calls us in, sends us out
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,
gives us love to tell, bread to share:
God-Immanuel everywhere!

Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!
Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!

Words: Fred Kaan

Music: Jamaican folk song, adapted Doreen Potter, arr Alister Spence

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God speaks to us

The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.

The Text: Matthew 25:14-20

Last week we began looking at three parables of Jesus in Matthew 25 about the end of time and Jesus' return. Last week's parable, the Ten Bridesmaids, reminds us to be prepared for Jesus' return by taking a view of life that goes beyond the here-and-now, and living every day from the point of view of an eternity with him.

There are parts of this second parable, often referred to as the Parable of the Talents, which are easy to understand. The 'man going on a trip' (v14) is Jesus, who leaves this world when he ascended into heaven. We are his servants – the people of his church who are left behind in his absence. He has entrusted his 'money' or his 'wealth' to us while he is gone, 'dividing it in proportion to (our) abilities' (v15 NLT).

Many English translations of the Bible call what the man 'entrusts' to his servants 'talents'. People often interpret these 'talents' as our gifts and abilities. However, Matthew uses the Greek word *talanton* which was actually a unit of weight. Scholars say that each talent was about 33 kilograms, which was about what a day labourer would earn in about 20 years. Just one talent of silver coins was a significant amount of money – imagine how much 34 kilograms of silver coins would be worth, or how much 20 years of wages would be! Then imagine what the reaction might have been from the servant who received five times this amount! What would you do with more money than you could earn in two and a half working lifetimes?

This brings us to the more significant and puzzling question of this parable: if interpreting these bags of money as our abilities or what we can do is a misunderstanding of the text, then what might they represent?

One way we can approach this parable is to ask what was most valuable thing

Jesus left with his followers when he ascended into heaven? There are a lot of ways we could answer this question and it is worth spending some time contemplating it. One way we can answer it, though, is that the most valuable thing Jesus has given us is the good news of his grace. Jesus' grace is a lot more than forgiveness so we can get to heaven. The grace Jesus gives to us includes everything we need for life in this world and the next. One way we can think about the good news of Jesus is that it's like a multi-faceted diamond where every side shines brightly with God's goodness to us. Another way is that it is a bag full of precious coins, with each coin showing us something different about God's grace to us in Jesus. There are a range of ways we can view grace, but it all comes from Jesus.

Like diamonds or a bag of silver coins, grace came at a high price. The value of the gospel, as well as all the gifts Jesus left with us when he ascended into heaven, is shown by the price Jesus paid in order to give them to us. Jesus gave his own life for us on the cross so we can have forgiveness, love, mercy, hope, and a whole new life in relationship with him. These are some of the ways in which we can look at the grace that Jesus entrusts to us in the time between his departure and his return on the last day.

Later in the Jesus' parable, the master returned to see what his servants had been doing with what he had entrusted to them. It raises the question: what are we doing with the grace Jesus has entrusted to us? Are we putting his forgiveness, love, mercy and hope to work by investing it in others? Or, like the third servant, are we burying it in the dirt?

What's more important in this parable than what we are doing with what Jesus has given us, is why we are doing what we do with God's grace. Jesus doesn't tell us how the first two servants doubled their master's money, but he does tell us why the third servant buried what was given to him. He told his master, 'I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth' (v25a NLT). He hid his master's money because he was afraid of losing it. In contrast, the master praises the first and second servants by calling them 'good and faithful'. They were faithful with what they were given. They were full of faith! As a result of this faith, they took chances with what they were given, doubled the amount, and earned their Master's praise!

Like the first two servants, Jesus wants us to be 'faithful' – full of faith – with what he has given us! He wants us to take chances with his grace, by investing it in people who deserve it the least but who need it the most. This parable tells us

that Jesus wants us to put his grace and love to work in the lives of others by being full of faith in the goodness of the One who entrusts his grace to us and in the value of the gift of grace itself.

This is not the time to bury what God has given us, but to boldly put it to work in the lives of others, trusting that God has already given us so much and that good will come when we invest his grace in other people. There are people in the church who are afraid of the future because of the changes happening in society around us, or because we are a declining and aging church. If we respond to these challenges with fear, we will be just like the servant who buried his bag of money in the dirt and lost it all. But if we are full of faith in the message of the gospel, and live confidently in the good news of Jesus' redemption of sinners and love for broken people, then we have something good to offer the people of our families, communities and nation.

The Parable of the Talents is about our approach to everything we do as God's people and Jesus' servants. Are we hiding away the grace Jesus has given us because we are afraid? Or are we living each day full of faith in God's goodness, trusting in his grace and putting his love to work in the lives of the people around us? When Jesus returns, will he find us living in faith or in fear of losing out—which is a selfish focus? If it is in selfish fear, then the message of this parable is that even what we have will be taken from us. But if we are living in a bold and even risk-taking faith, then Jesus' promise is that we will share in our Master's happiness for eternity.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

We confess our faith in the Triune God

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.**

**And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.**

He descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven,

and sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty,

from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic* church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

* 'catholic' here meaning 'universal'

We meditate on the song 'Gift to the world'

We bring the gifts that you have brought us,
we sing the songs that you are teaching to us.
Take our lives, take our time,
take our possessions;
Make us your gift to the world,
make us your gift to the world.

We bring the gifts that you have brought us,
we sing the songs that you are teaching to us.
Take our lives, take our time,
take our possessions;
Make us your gift to the world,
make us your gift to the world.

Words and music: Robin Mann
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We give of ourselves

Thank you, Lord, for all the gifts you have entrusted to us. Help us to remember that all we have comes from you and is to be used to serve you.

Make us faithful and trustworthy servants, always ready for your return. Amen.

We pray for others

Our peace and security is with God. Let us pray that he would give his church, and all people, the true satisfaction of our needs and desires.

Gracious and loving God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: you give to every person their years, days, and hours upon this earth. We thank and praise you for the time you have given us, and we pray that you would teach us to use our time in this life wisely. By your Holy Spirit, make us aware of the end of all things when

you will come to be our judge. Stir us up to lead holy lives, and to trust completely in your infinite mercy in Christ.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for your holy and universal church, that all your people would use the talents which you have given, and through them offer you good and faithful service. We thank you for the graduate pastors awaiting assignment in the LCA, and pray that you would give them patience and trust at this time. We give you thanks for those involved in spreading your word through the printed media. Bless our church with godly and helpful resources, and enable our congregations to choose wisely the materials they use for teaching and ministry.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

As you teach us to use our talents to your glory, so bless our nation that it may use the gifts and produce of this land wisely and justly. Help our nation to care for the environment, that resources may be conserved and fairly distributed, and that damage done may be healed. We pray for the just operation of banks and other financial institutions, for agriculture, fishing, and forestry. Give to our government wisdom, good judgement, and a willingness to listen carefully to the concerns of the people of this nation.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Have mercy on those who continue to suffer illness and hardship. We commend to you (*insert names here*). Make them ever aware of your loving presence with them and comfort them with your Holy Spirit, that in their distress they may accept your fatherly will and rejoice in your saving help.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Father, hear the prayers we offer to you, and sustain us in faith until you finally receive us with the words, 'Well done, good and faithful servants'. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

We pray the prayer of Jesus

**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.**

**Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.** *Matt 6:9-13*

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

The Triune God sends us out with blessing

May Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, shine on us and make us ready to meet him when he comes in glory.

And the blessing of almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be with us always.

Amen.

We meditate on the hymn 'Take my life and let it be'

1. Take my life and let me be
consecrated Lord to Thee.
Take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.
2. Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be
swift and beautiful for Thee.
3. Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my king.
Take my lips, and let them be,
filled with messages from Thee.
4. Take my silver and my gold;
not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use
every power as Thou shalt choose.
5. Take my will and make it Thine;
it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart; it is Thine own,
it shall be Thy royal throne.

6. Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at Thy feet its treasure-store.
Take myself, and I will be
ever only all for Thee.

*Frances Ridley Havergal, 1836-79, alt.
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Announcements