

Pentecost 24 November 15, 2020

Celebrations

November 15th Betty Lidster, 16th Eric Plaunt, 17th Tim Barrett, 18th Emma Greenslade
20th Carter Ruddock, 21st Milt Springer

Congregational Prayer Concerns

Cathy (Barrett)Tredenick	
Marilyn Cartwright	
Jason Carnegie	Milt Springer
Dick Ronald	Pauline Duffy & family
Carol Maes	Sally Paul
Rae Axford	Judy Jacklin
Mary Joan	Betty Graham
Marilyn Smith	The Ralf family
Pete Schellenberger	
Carl & Leena Sibley & family	
Bonnie Melvin & family of the late Vince Melvin	
Family & friends of the late Mary Underhill	
Hazel Brekelmans & family of the late Marion Rowland	
The family of the late Myron Cannady	
Family and friends of the late Jane Gagne	

Pastoral Prayer

This prayer is framed by selected verses from Psalm 123.
The words of the Psalm are printed in **Arial font**. Let us pray.

To You I lift up my eyes, O You who are throned in the heavens!

Gracious Creator God, we lift our eyes and our hearts to you in prayer. We come to you in the blessed assurance that you love us and will listen to us. Although the psalmist pictured you in his prayer as a king seated on a majestic throne, far removed from ordinary folks, we hold another image in our minds. We who follow Jesus remember a holy and vulnerable child born among us; one whose first nursery was a cattle stall; and whose servants were humble Galilean parents. privileged magi and care-worn shepherds. We think of your Christ who came to shine a light of love in our darkness, and speak words of truth and love into a world where lies and hatred causes suffering. Thank you, God that we however we imagine you in our minds, in our hearts we find you as the Eternal Essence of unconditional love and enduring life.

Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt. Our soul has had more than its fill of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.'

Loving God we offer our prayers for our world. During Remembrance Week we have been reminded of the high cost of war. We pray for veterans and military and their families as they

stand on guard for our nation and democratic way of life. We are grateful for the military women and men who marched into long-term care facilities in Canada this year to alleviate suffering and assist helpless citizens and fatigued and overwhelmed care givers. Thank you for their courage, expertise and compassion. They exemplify to us the necessity of putting service above self in order to bless and heal our broken world.

During the pandemic we pray for those who have been expressing a very different view of how to face this health crisis than is promote by those we've put in authority. Help us to humbly and willingly embrace what it means to "love our neighbor".

We continue to pray for nation, families and groups affected by conflict and human evil. Grant to all a path to peace and justice, O Lord with mercy! Help each of us to work for peace in our homes, places of work, communities and world. Bless the caring agencies that enable us to reach out to others across Canada and the world with resources and expressions of encouragement. We think of Canadian Baptist Ministries, and Baptist churches world wide that are keeping the faith and building up their communities with spiritual and material resources and prayers.

Have mercy upon us, O God!

Loving God extend your mercy also on those whose names are listed before us today or whose names are spoken in our hearts.

(Moment for your private prayers)

We pray for those who are hospitalized, undergoing treatments, experiencing grief at the loss of a dear one, struggling with depression or anxieties, or dealing with financial or economic issues or relationship issues.

We pray for those who are abused, homeless, unemployed, addicted, rejected by their families and discriminated against. We pray for indigenous communities who do not have safe water to drink. They do not deserve the contempt of the powerful and the privileged.

Have mercy upon us, O God!

Extend your mercy to us when we choose indifference over compassion, resentment over gratitude, lies over truth, laziness over caring action, and disdain over respect. Forgive us and teach us to forgive others and ourselves.

(Moment for your personal prayers) Extend your mercy to us, O God, so that we may become the people you call us to be.

As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, so our eyes look to the Lord our God until God has mercy upon us.

Thank you, God of Jesus, for hearing our prayer. Receive them as our offerings of loving devotion and loyalty to you and to Jesus, our Savior, Brother and Servant King. Thank you for the evidences of your grace that surround us every day in so many ways.

Thank you for our church family and for the saints alive and living forever in your presence who inspire us to walk the self-less Way of Jesus. United by your merciful, gracious Spirit, may we continue to pursue justice, love mercy and promote peace as your kingdom people.

To You we lift up our eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens,
and in our hearts! Amen

Gospel Matthew 25: 14-30 Another 'Kingdom of God' Parable from Jesus

¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ ²¹His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²²And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ ²³His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ ²⁶But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Sermon: WHAT WE DO IN THIS WAITING TIME

Do you find waiting difficult? Your answer may partly depend on what it is you’re waiting for. Most people hate to wait, especially when we can think of other things that we would much rather be doing.

The internet is filled with suggestions about things that we impatient and restless people can do while we’re waiting. Suggestions are many, from helping us fill time while waiting for our computers to update, to when we are standing in a long line at the store.

But over the last 9 months, everyone, including those who hate to wait have been living through an unusual experience. For the first time in a very long time, *the whole world*, the *whole world* is stuck in waiting mode. And, what’s even more strange, we’re all waiting for the exact same thing. We’re all waiting for this pervasive pandemic to end.

In the early days of this health crisis, people came together to support each other and our front-line workers and medical heroes. We remember the signs of hope and unity posted on windows, and chalked on sidewalks. One of the most popular catch phrases which we continue to hear and use is “We’re all in this together.”

We remember how, in the early months of the Covid crisis people expressed their solidarity with their neighbors and health care workers by banging pots and singing from roof tops and balconies. I remember watching with startled amusement as decorated vehicles paraded along my streets to celebrate someone's birthday. The drive by parades once viewed as novelties are now seen as normal.

Nine months have passed and we are getting tired of waiting. Waiting is hard. But waiting is what we continue to do. We don't have a choice in the matter. That said, each person has choices to make as to how to best manage and manoeuvre this pandemic. As time has gone on, it's becoming evident that some people are growing more fearful, agitated and angry about the wait.

Some people have chosen to deal with the situation by venting their anger. Some have been marching in groups their faces unprotected, while railing against public health orders. Regrettably, these activities create opportunities, not for justice to prevail, but for the virus to spread. The notion that science and religion are opposed to each other no longer holds. Over the past 9 months science has proclaimed from every podium the ancient words of the Torah and Jesus: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Tragically, not all are getting the message. Some people have chosen to use their wait time by behaving as they had prior to the pandemic. They are using drugs and alcohol to harm themselves and abuse their families. Anxieties increased over the pandemic coupled with children and women staying at home have given abusers more opportunity to pour fuel on the fire of harmful behaviours.

Then there are the people who, growing impatient with waiting chose to gather in overcrowded, unsupervised house parties and other gatherings. Sadly, their actions seem to be contributing to the alarming rise in Covid cases that our province and other provinces are now experiencing as we move into the winter months.

Thankfully, most people, I believe and hope are choosing to wait out this pandemic by using common sense and respecting the guidelines set out by Public Health authorities. Most people, inspired by our front-line community workers and health care professionals are filling their waiting time by staying home as much as possible, helping their neighbours, and supporting their community, including their churches, mosques, temples and synagogues.

Lots of folks are managing the wait by learning new skills. "Necessity is the mother of invention", as the saying goes. People are using other means, and creative ways to keep moving through this waiting time. People are adjusting to working from home, studying online, shopping online and timing their in-store shopping to avoid long lines and crowds. We've learned different ways to experience worship through television programming and You Tube videos.

Along this long road of waiting, we've been forced to stay home, pause often, and take time to reflect upon what really matters to us. We've become even more certain that what matters most to us are not things or wealth, but the people we've always loved, and the people we don't know but who need our compassion, respect, encouragement and prayers, as we all wait together.

Great news arrived this past week about a vaccine that is proving 90% effective in testing is putting a silver lining in the dark cloud of Covid-19. But we know that will have to wait for awhile yet, before the cloud completely lifts.

How will we manage Covid-fatigue? What can we do to keep our minds sharp and spirits up as the world crawls on a slow marathon towards a finish line that is not yet in sight? How will you choose to get through this time of waiting?

This challenging choice faced St. Matthew's community of the first century as they found themselves waiting for the risen Jesus to return. The common view of that time was that Jesus' miraculous resurrection could only mean that history was bearing down on its finish line. God was on the verge of over-taking over the world and establishing his forever kingdom. The fledgling church was excited to be part of God's new age. But as the years passed and Jesus' Second Coming as they pictured it, didn't materialize, the flock began to grow restless. They grew weary of waiting and anxious that maybe their loyalty to Jesus had been misplaced, or that they had done something wrong in the manner in which they were living. They were wondering how to live faithfully for Christ if they were going to be forced stay within a world that didn't acknowledge or care about God's coming kingdom.

The stories that Matthew the gospel writer places in his later chapters include parables meant to address the believers' angst about a long wait. The general message of these parables was that Jesus return would happen someday. The wait would be long, and the time of arrival would be unexpected.

"About that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven nor the Son. Only God the Father knows. ...Therefore, you must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour." Matthew 24: 36, 44

But the question remained for Matthew's church as to how they should choose to be faithful while they waited. Where they to stand on mountain tops with their binoculars waiting for the clouds to split open? Where they to hide in caverns and stay socially distanced from society to avoid being contaminated by human evil and sin?

Were they to form militias of righteous warriors who would march and rave against Rome like Crusaders would battle against the followers of Mohammed many centuries later?

What should faithfulness look like while we wait for the kingdom to come in its fullness? The parable of the Talents addresses that question. First let me introduce this parable by saying that parables are constructed in a way that is meant to make them a challenge to interpret. They are stories of the everyday impregnated with a spiritual or moral meaning. The miraculous thing about parables is that they are subject to multiple interpretations. Each person searches a parable for a meaning that speaks to their circumstance. Hence, the parable of the talents like many of Jesus' parables has been interpreted in many ways.

Today we'll interpret it in the light of Jesus' other teachings in Matthew and the other gospels about being a follower of Jesus looks like. Admittedly, there are aspects of this story which we find odd coming from Jesus. The negative response of the master to the thrifty third servant doesn't seem consistent with Jesus teachings about forgiving and not judging others.

We're going to leave the ending alone for now. In parables about the kingdom of God usually a major character represents God. In this parable I suggest that the master represents Jesus. Remember, Matthew is addressing the high anxiety of the early church about Jesus delay in returning. The master in the story goes away for an extended period of time. We know that he'll be gone a long time because he chose to entrust his property into the care of his servants. If the master represents Jesus then we may assume that the three slaves represented the church.

There is no indication given in the story that the servants knew when their master would return. The early church didn't know when Jesus would return to establish his earthly kingdom. Before he headed out on his journey, the master gave each servant a portion of his personal property to look after. Scholars estimate the value of one talent, which was the monetary value of property entrusted to servant #3 equalled just over 1 million dollars in 2020 currency. The others were given way more than that. So, the master endowed his servants with a fortune to look after in his absence.

When Jesus lived among us, he was a poor man. He didn't have a home of his own. He was dependent on the kindness of strangers and friends. When he died, he didn't have a grave plot. He was buried in a tomb owned by a secret admirer. So, what kind of property or type of treasure are symbolized by the talents? The treasure beyond price that Jesus gave to the world was himself and a ministry of blessing, affirmation and grace "for a world of lost sinners", as the beloved hymn *The Old Rugged Cross* says. Can we even attempt a list of the riches bestowed on humanity by Jesus? What we've received is more than we can name or enumerate.

For starters, there's the gift of the Spirit that remains with us and lives in us to give us comfort, courage, hope and spiritual insight. There's the gift of eternal life and forgiveness of sins. There are the signs of God's grace that imbues us and everything around us. And then there are the teachings of Jesus. In Matthew's gospel the Sermon on the Mount begins with Jesus telling the poor, grieving, meek, and persecuted that they are blessed in God's sight. They are God's light and salt in their world. Later in chapter 25 Matthew includes the parable of the sheep and the goats. It's another end of time parable that emphasizes the nature of Christ's earthly investments, as they were embodied and shared by his representatives.

When they preached the good news of the kingdom to the whole world, visited the sick, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, advocated for the prisoner and welcomed the stranger they did it to Christ. Matthew 25: 31-46
(Carla Works, Commentary on Matthew 25:14-30)

So to summarize, let us imagine that Jesus is the master in this parable. The church are the servants. The property that he entrusted to their care is his ministry of a gospel of loving words and deeds. The different amounts or sizes of the endowments to the servants could simply represent the variety of spiritual gifts or the variety of people that belong to the church. The church has been entrusted with a superabundance of spiritual treasure to possess and to share, to invest and to give.

This leads us to the part of the story where the master makes his return. Take note, Matthew is saying to a church in waiting, "Your master will return." When he returns he

discovers to his great joy that two of his servants have been very busy during his absence. They have been diligently investing the property placed in their care and keeping. They have taken some risks, daring to sharing it and use it, as they hope and trust that the master would have done. The master is so delighted that they have used and increased his wealth that he gives them even greater opportunities. To servant 1 and 2 he says, “Well done, good and trustworthy servants, enter into the joy of your Lord!” Then the third servant shows up, carrying the one talent that he’d been given. The servant presents his master with the property which had gone unused, untouched, unseen; buried, from the day that he received it until the day he returned it.

The master was not happy. He learned that the person to whom he had entrusted some of his most precious and valuable property did not trust him. Instead, out of fear, or laziness or doubt that the master would return, he chose to bury the gift, where it could not benefit anyone, except the master, if he ever came back. By not trusting his master, and by not fully trusting in his master’s belief in his ability to use what he had been given, the servant brought judgement on himself.

What do we do, we who follow Jesus while living in this imperfect and hurting world? What do we do while we wait through a pandemic and wait for God’s kingdom revealed in Jesus to be fulfilled?

I’m going to keep answering God’s calling on my life to share the good news of God’s amazing grace and unconditional love for the world. I’m going to keep sounding the message that God is a God of love, not wrath, and that each person, no matter their culture, religion, economic status, gender or sexual orientation is a child of God. I’m going to continue to support LGBTQ+ people who need their churches to accept them. I’m going to pray for the sick, visit and minister to the people in my congregation. I’m going to keep supporting community agencies that support the most vulnerable. And I’m going to remind you, my sisters and brothers in Christ that you are blessed, that you have been endowed by Jesus with precious treasure that you must continue to share, invest, and give. As we serve Jesus through this waiting time, let us do so with joy and gratitude. Let us be vigilant and patient, waiting for that moment, which will surely come; that moment when we hear the shout resounding through the corridors of Glory: “Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your God!”

Amen

