

23rd Sunday after Pentecost
November 8, 2020
Cross of Glory Lutheran Church
Brooklyn Center, MN

PRELUDE

WELCOME

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God, who creates, redeems, and sustains us and all of creation. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Faithful God, **have mercy on us. We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We turn from your loving embrace and go our own ways. We judge others before examining ourselves. We place our own needs before the needs of our neighbors. Humble us, have mercy on us, and turn us again to life in you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

God hears the cries of all who call out in need, and through his death and resurrection, Christ has made us his own. Hear the truth that God proclaims: Your sins are forgiven in the name of † Jesus Christ. Led by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness to do God's work in the world. **Amen.**

GATHERING HYMN #262 Wait for the Lord

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart! *(repeated)*

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

KYRIE

In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above, and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house, and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.

Amen, amen.

HYMN OF PRAISE

Refrain: This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God.

Power and riches, wisdom and strength, and honor and blessing and glory are his. *Refrain*

Sing with all the people of God, and join in the hymn of all creation: Blessing and honor, glory and might be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen. *Refrain*

For the Lamb who was slain has begun his reign. Alleluia. *Refrain*

PRAYER OF THE DAY The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Let us pray . . . **God of justice and love, you illuminate our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us to your presence all around us, and keep us attentive to the needs of others, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

READING: Amos 5:18-24

¹⁸Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD!

Why do you want the day of the LORD?

It is darkness, not light;

¹⁹as if someone fled from a lion,
and was met by a bear;

or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall,
and was bitten by a snake.

²⁰Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it?

²¹I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

²²Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;

and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.

²³Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

²⁴But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SPECIAL MUSIC

Mark Trease and Keith Williams

GOSPEL: Matthew 25:1-13

The holy gospel according to St. Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹²But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ ¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.

-Mary Oliver

The late poet Mary Oliver boils down life to these three steps. It all begins, she suggests, with attention. In order to “be astonished” by life, and in order to “tell about it,” we must first look closely, listen carefully, ask questions, get curious. In order to really *live*, Oliver claims, we must first pay attention.

I can't help but think that Oliver may have had today's parable from Matthew in mind, as it seems to give similar instruction. The parable begins as many do: “The kingdom of heaven is like this.” Jesus goes on to tell the disciples a story about a wedding that is soon to take place. As was custom at the time, the bridesmaids were to wait at the bride's home until the groom arrived, and then the wedding party would process to the groom's home by way of a candlelit procession. The groom, however, is delayed, so all the bridesmaids fall asleep. Then finally, around midnight, they receive the news: the groom is here! Five of the bridesmaids had brought extra oil, so they trim their lamps and join the procession. But the other five didn't have any oil reserves; their lamps were out. “Give us some of your oil,” they say to the others. “No,” the five with oil reply. “There won't be enough for us all. Go out and buy some for yourselves.” So the five women take their unlit lamps and head out into the night in search of oil. When they return from their midnight shopping excursion, they find the door of the wedding banquet closed. “Let us in,” they say. “We're ready now.” But the groom denies them, and ends with a warning: “Keep awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” (Keep awake can also be translated as “be vigilant,” “be alert,” “pay attention...”)

I'm not going to skirt around the elephant in the room here: this is a troubling parable. Theologians debate about how this parable should be interpreted—whether it should be read allegorically, with Jesus representing the groom, and us either being the wise bridesmaids who are ready for Jesus' return, or the foolish ones who are caught off guard and unprepared. Others warn against a reading with such clear characters, reminding us that Jesus' parables are intended, in part, to throw us for a loop, to always keep us scratching our heads. Regardless of how we read it, this parable doesn't sound like very good news. So what is this story about? What's Jesus trying to tell us? What are we being told to pay attention *to*?

Looking at the context in which this parable was written may give us some clues. The parable, which only appears in Matthew's gospel, was written 50-60 years after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. The memory of Jesus—and his promise to return—was still very fresh in the minds of the early Christians. They were expecting Jesus to come back any day now. But as one biblical scholar says, Christians then and now tend to get “absorbed with trying to figure out when the end will come, trying to match the symbolic imagery of the Bible with events in our world and to come up with some kind of timetable, some type of script for the end times. Yet Jesus says clearly that this is a waste of time” (Johnson). “You know neither the day nor the hour,” our text today says (25:13).

As Christians, we live in an “already/not yet” tension, and this is the “not yet” part. Jesus has already come, but he has not yet come again. Not yet has God's kingdom come, as we pray in the Lord's Prayer (reading the news for all of a minute these days makes that painfully obvious). Not yet has “justice roll[ed] down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-running stream,” as today's text from Amos says. The way the world is now is not as it shall be, because, as one African-American theologian puts it: “There's something else a' comin'” (Carter).

And so today's parable speaks to how we're to *live in the meantime*. And we're told how in the final words of the groom: Keep awake. Pay attention. The so-called foolish bridesmaids weren't foolish because they forgot to bring extra oil, or because they fell asleep. Their problem is that at the critical moment when they were to attend the groom, they get caught up in attending to something else. "They were foolish because they acted as if their primary job was to have oil in their lamps, when this was only a means to an end" (Johnson). Their job was to see that Jesus had come, and ready or not, there was a party to be had. Wake up, ladies! Forget about the oil. Jesus—the one whose presence you've been preparing for—is *already* here! Or as Mary Oliver might say: Pay attention! Be astonished. Tell about it.

That is the call to the five oil-less women in today's story, and *that's* the call to us too (to those of us who are perhaps a bit low on fuel as well). While we prepare for Jesus to come again, our call is to pay attention to the Jesus who is *already* in our midst. We don't know how or when or where or in whom Jesus will appear, but he's here! Now! The groom has come! **We are called, then, to live attentively, expecting an unexpected Jesus.**

Now I want to name something that I think we often tend to get wrong: Living in the meantime, living on "this side" of Jesus' return is *not* a passive or even patient endeavor. As Matthew shows us throughout his Gospel when he speaks of our call to feed the hungry, give the thirsty something to drink, welcome the strange, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit the incarcerated (25:35-36), living expectantly is active. It's urgent. As we live in hope for the "something else [that's] a' comin'" someday, we embody that hope *here and now*.

So what does it mean to live expectantly? What does paying attention actually look like on the ground? The late author David Foster Wallace wrote an amazing commencement speech (the link to the speech in the bulletin if you're interested in checking it out), and in it, he shares another kind of parable: "There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says 'Morning, boys. How's the water?' And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes 'What the heck is water?'" The point of the story, Wallace says, is "that the most obvious, important realities are often the ones that are hardest to see and talk about." He challenges us to pay attention to that which is "hidden in plain sight all around us, all the time." He claims that because our default setting is a self-centered one that causes us to be *inattentive* to the world around us, we must continually remind ourselves as we swim through the world: "This is water. This is water. This is water."

Wallace illustrates this further by describing what is probably a common experience for most of us. He says, you go to the supermarket at the end of a long workday. The store's very crowded, because of course it's the time of day when all the other people are stopping on their way home from work too. So you grab a cart, which has one wheel that very adamantly wants to go in the opposite direction you're trying to push it. You're only there to get a couple cans of soup and some bread so this should be quick, but you find yourself wandering all over the massive, over-lit store's confusing aisles, listening to soul-sucking corporate pop, maneuvering your way through other tired and hurried people trying to direct their own, big, stupid, disobedient carts. You finally make it to the check-out to find that there aren't enough lanes open even though it's the end-of-the-day rush. The kid behind you in line is screaming and the mom's screaming at the kid which makes you even more annoyed. You finally get to the cashier, who is unreasonably rude. You pack your items in a flimsy plastic bag and make your way out through the crowded, bumpy, littered parking lot, and then you have to drive all the way home through slow, heavy, SUV-intensive, rush-hour traffic. Etc. Etc. Etc. Wallace paints a vivid picture.

But paying attention, Wallace suggests, means to have an awareness that *pierces through* the monotony of such situations. It urges us to think different kinds of thoughts, to ask different kinds of questions, to see that store and the people in it through a different kind of lens. Paying attention, we might ask: "Who is this mother and child in line behind you? What is their story? Why might they be so distressed? Perhaps they're hungry? Sick? Sleepless? Perhaps the

mother has just been evicted from her home, or let go from the job that was needed to feed her child?” Paying attention urges us to ask: “*Who* is the checkout lady? What might be causing her shortness? This is an extremely hard and thankless job. What could I say to her that might make her day slightly less taxing as she deals with customers like me?” Paying attention urges us to ask: “Where does this bread come from? What land was it grown on? Whose hands helped harvest the wheat, and what are their lives like? Are they compensated fairly? How will this bread sustain my body for tomorrow? How can I share this bread with those who need it more than I do?” Paying attention urges us to constantly remind ourselves, in other words: “This is water. This is water. This is water.”

Or as Christians, we might say, paying attention urges us to constantly remind ourselves: “Jesus is here. Jesus is here. Jesus is here” ...in a tired mother, in a hungry child, in an overworked cashier, in a loaf of bread. Paying attention is the constant remind and conviction that *God is here*.

I want to be clear, though: attention is not something we can muster up on our own. Living expectantly isn’t something we do because we are good at it, or because we’re more holy than anyone else. Attentiveness is only possible because of God’s grace. On our own, we’d move through the grocery store and the world tending only to ourselves. Only because of God’s grace can we have the courage to look around, to pay attention to not our own interests and needs but to the interests and needs of the neighbor.

Next week, we celebrate Stewardship Sunday, the time when we lift up the financial commitments we all make in light of this reality that *God is here*. As you’ll read more about in upcoming communications, this year’s stewardship theme is “Always Being Made New.” It’s a statement of expectation. Of attentiveness to the God who is here. You will be invited, challenged, to live (and give!) expectantly, hopefully, courageously—foolishly, even—putting our dollars boldly behind the belief that God is at work and is doing something new in our church and in our community.

The call to live expectantly may feel totally overwhelming or even impossible right now, in these particularly doubt-filled days. I’m recording this on a Wednesday (the day after the election) and you hear it on a Sunday, so who knows what will unfold in the days between. But regardless, these are days tensions are running high, when violent words and even actions are leveled across class and race and party line, when we are challenged even more so to be attentive to the presence of God in “the other” who is different than us, when uncertainty fills us with fear. It will be tempting in the days ahead to be like the so-called wise bridesmaids who cling tightly to the oil we have and not share it with those who need it. It will also be tempting to be distracted like the so-called foolish bridesmaids, to get so caught up in finding ourselves a little fuel to get by that we miss the Jesus who is already here, and to miss the party that is about to begin.

But let us cling to and be fueled by *this* good news: Though our lamps may be dim, God’s light has already come and broken forth into this dark world. God is here—among us and all around us, showing up in surprising places and unexpected people and unanticipated times.

So pay attention.
Be astonished.
And tell about it.
Amen!

Sources:

- David Foster Wallace, “This is Water,” Commencement Speech at Kenyon College, 2005 (for full script go to <https://fs.blog/2012/04/david-foster-wallace-this-is-water/>).
- Elisabeth Johnson, Commentary on Matthew 24:1-13, *Working Preacher*, March 31, 2019.
- J. Kameron Carter, “Something Else A’ Comin’” *Contending Modernities*, May 31, 2019.

HYMN OF THE DAY #726 Light Dawns on a Weary World

- 1** Light dawns on a weary world
when eyes begin to see
all people's dignity.
Light dawns on a weary world:
the promised day of justice comes.
- Refrain** The trees shall clap their hands;
the dry lands, gush with springs;
the hills and mountains shall break forth with singing!
We shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace,
as all the world in wonder echoes shalom.
- 2** Love grows in a weary world
when hungry hearts find bread
and children's dreams are fed.
Love grows in a weary world:
the promised feast of plenty comes.
- 3** Hope blooms in a weary world
when creatures, once forlorn,
find wilderness reborn.
Hope blooms in a weary world:
the promised green of Eden comes.
- Refrain** the promised green of Eden comes. **Refrain**

CONFESSION OF FAITH Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and 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.

OFFERTORY

Thank you for continuing to support and sustain the work of Cross of Glory with your offering. On the back of the bulletin you'll find an update on our giving status. Please prayerfully consider what you're able to give. You may send a check to the church (5929 Brooklyn Blvd, Brooklyn Center, MN 55429), or contact Sue in the office to learn more about how to set up automatic, online giving. We are so grateful for your continued generosity!

OFFERTORY RESPONSE I Will Wait for You Worship Service

- 1** Out of the depths I cry to You
In darkest places I will call
Incline Your ear to me anew
And hear my cry for mercy Lord
- 2** Were You to count my sinful ways
How could I come before Your throne
Yet full forgiveness meets my gaze
I stand redeemed by grace alone
- Chorus** I will wait for You I will wait for You
On Your word I will rely
I will wait for You surely wait for You
Till my soul is satisfied
- 3** So put Your hope in God alone
Take courage in His power to save
Completely and forever won
By Christ emerging from the grave
- 4** His steadfast love has made a way
And God Himself has paid the price
That all who trust in Him today
Find healing in His sacrifice
- Chorus** I will wait for You I will wait for You
Through the storm and through the night
I will wait for You surely wait for You
For Your love is my delight

OFFERING PRAYER

Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things. You have given us the gifts of your good creation. Nourish us at the tables we find ourselves today, and send us forth to set tables in the midst of a suffering world, through Jesus Christ, the bread of life. Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE

Trusting that God is here, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need...

God with us, we confess that we are not attentive to you. We are not faithful in using the gifts you've abundantly given. We forget those most vulnerable among us. We fail to see your beautiful image in those different than us. Open our hearts to your presence around us, open our eyes to see you in unexpected places and people, and open our hands to all in need. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of life together, you draw us into one body across difference, disagreement, and division. As we head into the coming days in the wake of this election, guide our newly-elected leaders and empower us all as we work for love that attends to the margins, peace that is not passive, conversations that are brave, hope that is steadfast, justice that rolls down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of the banquet, we pray for all those who hunger today. For those who hunger for a safe place to call home, for employment, for companionship, for an absent loved one, for rest, for bread. Fill us and feed us, O God. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of darkness and God of light, you made sea and sky, sun and moon, earth and all the creatures that dwell within it. We praise you for the abundant gifts of your creation. Forgive us when we fail to be faithful stewards of them, and help our hands lovingly care for the work of your hands. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of healing, send your Spirit to all our sisters and brothers who are hurting today. We pray for all those who have been impacted by Covid-19, for those who struggle with chronic pain, for those battling cancer, for those who face depression or anxiety. We pray especially for Gil Hartlage, Terry Stejskal, the Dahl family, Vicky Jacobson, Jeanine Kuzmich, and John Thomson. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

May the God in whose image we all are made, who claims us and calls us beloved, and who strengthens us for service, hear now our prayers, which we pray in the name of Jesus, our risen Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered together as one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray the prayer Jesus taught us...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

Mothering God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you and lead you into life. **Amen.**

SENDING FORTH SONG Everlasting God

Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord
We will wait upon the Lord
We will wait upon the Lord
Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord
We will wait upon the Lord
We will wait upon the Lord

Our God You reign forever
Our Hope our strong Deliv'rer

You are the everlasting God
The everlasting God, You do not faint
You won't grow weary
You're the defender of the weak
You comfort those in need
You lift us up on wings like eagles

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Pay attention to your neighbor.

Thanks be to God.

Congregational Support as of 9/30/2020

Annual Budget: \$225,000.00

Year to Date Budgeted: \$168,325.01

Year to Date Received: \$163,673.12

Difference: \$-4,651.89

Community Announcements

- Following today's Zoom worship service, you're invited to grab a cup of coffee and join us for Virtual Coffee Hour, a brief time of small-group fellowship.
- Bible Study continues to gather on Tuesday mornings at 9:30 am on Zoom as we explore the texts for the upcoming week. All are welcome!
- Cross of Glory is putting together a Thanksgiving devotional of gratitude prayers and table graces for you to use at home this year. If you have a favorite Thanksgiving prayer or a table grace you'd like to include, please share them with Sue by Nov 18. You're also invited to share one thing you're thankful for, and we'll compile those statements to remind us of the many gifts God gives. Sue can be reached by phone at 763-533-8602 or by email at svukelich@crossofglory.us.
- On Sunday, Nov 22, we'll be having a service of Lessons + Music. Please call or email the office with your favorite hymn or song suggestion by Nov 11 and we'll do our best to include it!
- This year on Thanksgiving Eve day, Nov 25, Pastor Ali will be available to meet you individually or as a family in the sanctuary for 10 minutes of prayer and/or holy communion. Call or email the office to schedule a time between 11 am and 7 pm.
- Cross of Glory's Community Needs Circle invites you to support local families as the holiday season nears. This year, in lieu of CEAP's Toys for Joy event, CEAP is collecting monetary donations to share with local families in need. Reach out to Barb Thomson at bjthomson@comcast.net or 763-425-9393 to learn more about how to donate.
- Keep an eye out this week for stewardship information and pledge cards. We'll be celebrating Stewardship Sunday next week, Nov 15, and we invite you to begin prayerfully considering your 2021 pledge today. Don't hesitate to contact Pastor Ali if you have any questions or would like to discuss giving.
- Our choir director Keith Williams (also a potter and art and art history professor at Concordia) has a piece featured in a new online exhibit titled "Foot in the Door" at the Minneapolis Institute of Art. To explore the free exhibit, go to <https://new.artsmia.org/>
- Pastor Ali is available for pastoral care and prayer. Reach out to her anytime at atranvik@crossofglory.us or phone 763-533-8602.