

Morning Prayer 15th November 2020

The Second Sunday before Advent

Service with Christine Ghinn



Personal preparation before the service begins.
Please take time to remember where you are,
and why you are here.
Give thanks and become still
in the presence of God

Prelude

Holy Spirit, come abide within,
May Your joy be seen in all I do.
Love enough to cover every sin,
In each thought and deed and attitude.
Kindness to the greatest and the least,
Gentleness that sows the path of peace.
Turn my strivings into works of grace;
Breath of God show Christ in all I do.

Holy Spirit, from creation's birth,
Giving life to all that God has made,
Show Your power once again on earth,
Cause Your church to hunger for your ways.
Let the fragrance of our prayers arise;
Lead us on the road of sacrifice,
That in unity the face of Christ
May be clear for all the world to see.

CCLI Song # 4779872
Keith Getty | Stuart Townend
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Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with us.
This is the day that the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Song

Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.
Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in endless praise,
let them flow in endless praise.

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,
swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice and let me sing
always, only, for my King.
Take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee,
filled with messages from thee.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee,
ever, only, all for thee.

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Let us pray with words from Psalm 90.1-8 + 12

(A prayer of Moses the man of God.)

Lord, you have been our refuge ♦
from one generation to another.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
or the earth and the world were formed, ♦
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
You turn us back to dust and say: ♦
'Turn back, O children of earth.'
For a thousand years in your sight are but as
yesterday, ♦
which passes like a watch in the night.
You sweep them away like a dream; ♦
they fade away suddenly like the grass.
In the morning it is green and flourishes; ♦
in the evening it is dried up and withered.
For we consume away in your displeasure; ♦
we are afraid at your wrathful indignation.
You have set our misdeeds before you ♦
**and our secret sins in the light of your
countenance.**

...

So teach us to number our days ♦
that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit,

**As it was in the beginning,
is now and shall be for ever.**

The Collect for today, the Second Sunday before
Advent

Heavenly Lord,
you long for the world's salvation:
stir us from apathy,
restrain us from excess
and revive in us new hope
that all creation will one day be healed
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The first reading is taken from 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Let us prepare ourselves for the word of God

Our hearts and our minds are open

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 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. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 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.

The reading is taken from Matthew 25:14-30

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

Glory to you, O Lord

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. 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. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 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.’

“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!’

“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.’

“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!’

“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. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

“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? 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.

““So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. 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. 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.

Homily

Two Sides of the same Coin

"Be sure you start with a joke," they said,
"You'll have the congregation at the edge of their seats!"

So here we go:

Two men are shipwrecked on an Island. One man paces back and forth worried and scared. The other man however sits back, enjoying the sunshine and gentle breeze.

The first man cries, "Aren't you afraid we are about to die."

"No," yawns the second man, "I earn ten thousand euros a week and tithed faithfully to my church. It's Stewardship Month right now. My vicar will find me."

This is the time of year when we as a congregation normally think about our church donations. So today's gospel reading, The Parable of the Bags of Gold, seems to come in handy. Especially if you're considering that the wife of one of the treasurers happened to be allocated to talk to you this morning.

What wondrous divine provision!
What could possibly go wrong?

This would be the perfect opportunity for you to lean back and let your mind wander. Because you know what's coming anyway. You've heard this sermon countless times before:

Give generously! Volunteer! And in return God will bless you!

Only, that those clean-cut, faithfully handed down messages sometimes tickle out my rebellious side. I love a good “Yes, but...!” objection and am learning to take seriously the ambivalence, discomfort and bewilderment that certain bible passages stir up in me.

This morning’s tale about the master and his three servants is such a text. After some initial irritation, followed by prayerful thinking and some reading I am still left with a big question: Who actually is the good guy and who is the bad guy in the final showdown between the master and the third servant?

Perceiving the servant as the villain is probably the most common reading. His master exhibits a great amount of confidence in his servants by putting them in charge of these huge sums of money. Scholars reckon that each bag of gold here was worth about 15-20 year’s wages of a day labourer. When getting down to settle accounts the third servant presents, instead of profits, false accusations and a disregard for his master’s generosity and trust. He has not just buried the gold in the ground, but also their relationship.

Yet, there is a very different analysis possible. Here, the servant that is scolded as wicked and lazy becomes the hero of the narrative. In a revolutionary act he refuses to participate in an exploitative system in which the winner takes it all and the righteous must suffer. Seen from this angle, we discover a hefty critique of a world that chases profit, power and praise.

So which one is it then? Both interpretations of the story make sense: the third servant as the villain or him as the hero? How did Jesus mean this parable to be understood? The stakes seem higher than my confidence in my interpreting abilities. After all, these are Christ’s words that I’m asked to grasp, despite my vision being clouded by my very own biases.

Let's be brave and take another look to see if we can at least get a glimpse of the Kingdom of God described by Matthew:

There is option A, if you will. Here servant number three refuses to care for what's been given to him. What do we learn? Perhaps: Handle the gifts that have been given to you wisely for the glory of God's kingdom!

The master displays God's reckless generosity which transforms us and makes us equally generous. Sharing our possessions and the Good News furthers the Kingdom of God.

The rebellious servant of Option B however challenges us to use what we have to stand up against injustice and abuse. We recognise Jesus in the rebuked and punished servant who inspires us to not give in to a harmful Status Quo and to accept being shamed in order to grow the Kingdom.

As different as the two interpretations might seem – the heart of the parable stays the same: Our actions, decisions and material possessions matter in bringing God's Kingdom about. We are called to take risks and to act with integrity and generosity.

Just to be sure, this doesn't mean that our salvation and the building of the Kingdom of God is solely down to us. Paul reminds the Ephesians: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast."

At the same time though this parable expresses what James described with the words: "Faith without deeds is dead."

No least to myself, it is with some surprise to realise that we have come full circle. Starting off somewhat mocking the stereotypical stewardship sermon I find myself saying to you: "Deal wisely with your possessions, your time, your gifts and abilities. They are a generous gift from God and a powerful tool to make you co-creators of the Kingdom of God!"

and also: “Join with integrity and courage in opposing unjust structures to further the Kingdom!”

Yes, there are two (or even more) ways to make meaning of this parable.

We are invited to not shy away from ambivalence, but to let it be a starting point for further digging and deeper conversations. What a better place for practising this than a diverse community like the ACF! As a wise person said in their facebook comment:

“Bewilderment and discomfort are necessary steps to perceiving the kingdom of God.”

Amen.

Intercessions (by Wolfgang)

Let us pray for the church, our community, and all those in need.

Let us pray for those of us who need it most, the ones who are struggling with serious medical afflictions, and are putting up a heroic fight – let us pray for Margaret, for Bev, and for Brian: help us to make them feel that they are not alone, that though we may be physically distant we form a tight and warm huddle around them with our prayers.

Lord in your mercy –
hear our prayer

However much we would like to hug each other like we used to before the current biblical unpleasantry: We need to take courage and hold on until it is safer again to do so. Help us in your mercy to remain strong and confident that this is just a transition and not the dawning of a new social ice age

Lord in your mercy –
hear our prayer

There were some good news this past week, or at least news that have the power to blossom into good in the

future. One of them was the likely development of a vaccine. Lord, help all those working in the field of vaccine development, and also the doctors and the nurses and the others working on the frontlines of this pandemic to keep up their spirit, and to feel our gratefulness

Lord in your mercy –
hear our prayer

The other good news indicate that there might be a return to something approximating normality in the world of politics – I am not overly optimistic , since by now we are dealing with a religious rather than a political problem. But maybe it helps if we at least pray for the deluded followers of that person currently still occupying the office of president of the United States: that they may realise that just because somebody gets infected and has to be hospitalised, from which he returns on the third day, he does not have any claim to messianic qualities.

Lord in your mercy –
hear our prayer

Finally, we pray for ourselves – we are fortunate in that we have a lot of people who haven't buried the talents and capacities they have somewhere in a field, but who use them for the benefit of all: our singers sing, our musicians play music, and our leaders of the congregation lead, and preach, and conduct services. Now all we need to find is the guys who've doubled their financial assets recently...

Lord in your mercy –
hear our prayer

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

In the language of our hearts, let us pray as our Saviour taught us

The Conclusion

The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life.

Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Postlude

Blessings

Laura Story

We pray for blessings

We pray for peace

Comfort for family, protection while we sleep

We pray for healing, for prosperity

We pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering

All the while, You hear each spoken need

Yet love is way too much to give us lesser things

'Cause what if your blessings come through raindrops

What if Your healing comes through tears

What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to
know You're near

What if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise

We pray for wisdom

Your voice to hear

We cry in anger when we cannot feel You near

We doubt your goodness, we doubt your love

As if every promise from Your Word is not enough

All the while, You hear each desperate plea

And long that we'd have faith to believe

When friends betray us

When darkness seems to win

We know that pain reminds this heart

That this is not our home

What if my greatest disappointments

Or the aching of this life

Is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy

What if trials of this life

The rain, the storms, the hardest nights
Are your mercies in disguise