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St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Wilton, WI

24th Sunday after Pentecost
November 15, 2020

**Inviting People to
Journey with Christ's Family
In Spreading God's Love and Mercy**
Broadcasting on 91.5 FM

Our readings during November speak of the end times. Zephaniah proclaims that the coming day of the LORD will be filled with wrath and distress. Paul says it will come like a thief in the night and urges us to be awake and sober. Jesus tells the parable of the talents, calling us to use our gifts, while we still have time, for the greater and common good. In a world filled with violence and despair, we gather around signs of hope—word, water, bread, and wine—eager to welcome the good news of Christ's coming among us.

Gathering

*The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God**

Gathering Hymn

Come, All You People

Come, all you people, come and praise the Most High;
come, all you people, come and praise the Most High;
come, all you people, come and praise the Most High;
come now and worship the Lord.

Come, all you people, come and praise the Savior;
come, all you people, come and praise the Savior;
come, all you people, come and praise the Savior;
come now and worship the Lord.

Come, all you people, come and praise the Spirit;
come, all you people, come and praise the Spirit;
come, all you people, come and praise the Spirit;
come now and worship the Lord.

Prayer of the Day

Righteous God, our merciful master, you own the earth and all its peoples, and you give us all that we have. Inspire us to serve you with justice and wisdom, and prepare us for the joy of the day of your coming, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

WORD

*God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.**

FIRST READING

Zephaniah (like the prophet Amos in last week's first reading) presents the day of the LORD as one of judgment and wrath. Descriptions of the last day in the New Testament include details taken from Old Testament accounts of the day of the LORD.

A reading from Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

⁷Be silent before the Lord GOD!

For the day of the LORD is at hand;
the LORD has prepared a sacrifice,
he has consecrated his guests.

¹²At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,

and I will punish the people
who rest complacently on their dregs,
those who say in their hearts,
"The LORD will not do good,
nor will he do harm."

¹³Their wealth shall be plundered,
and their houses laid waste.

Though they build houses,
they shall not inhabit them;
though they plant vineyards,
they shall not drink wine from them.

formers were almost all from Southeastern Minnesota. There were barbershop quartets, trios, bands, and community/church choir groups featuring gospel, country, and other types of music. The concerts have been offered for at least 25 years. They provide an opportunity for people to learn more about this rural church and to participate in this fun, community get-together.

These drive-in events remind us that even during these challenging times, when the weather has been warmer, there have been ways that we could fellowship together. The Sunday Drive-In Worship Services at St. Paul's have been very successful! I would like to thank the family of Galetta Brandau (Lori Brueggen's mother) for the memorial fund donation that allowed us to purchase the radio transmitter and speaker. Thank you to Lori and Nalani for suggesting this idea to the Church Council. Thank you also, to Nalani and Greg for their weekly commitment in setting up and taking down the equipment and all the items needed for worship. Thanks to Justin for running the equipment on occasion, and assisting in many other ways. Thanks to other Church Council members for their help (especially when the winds blew!), and to all our readers and ushers. And thank you to all of you, church members and friends, who attended, listened from home, or encouraged others to do so.

While our Drive-In Sunday Worship Services for 2020 end today, they will live on in our memories. God has been with us each Sunday, and God will continue to be with us as we worship in our homes in the Sundays to come! Thanks be to God.

Peace,
Pastor Cathy

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Today is the final Sunday Drive-In Worship Service at St. Paul's for 2020. We will have two Drive-In Services on Christmas Eve, but due to the Coronavirus, Sundays for the next few months will be in the safety of your own home. This is a prudent and wise change during this time of surging Coronavirus cases. Although many of us wish we could be together, we can be thankful for the many Sundays that we were able to spend at the Drive-In Worship Services.

The services have reminded me of other church-sponsored drive-in events that I have attended over the years. In Berne, Minnesota, each Wednesday evening during the summer, the Zwingli United Church of Christ offers a drive-in concert and wood-fired pizza! This year, friends told me that the format was changed to increase safety. People would drive into the parking area and stop at the first table to order their pizza(s) and beverage(s). At the next table, they would pay. At the final stop, they would pick up their pizza(s) and beverage(s) from the table, and head to a parking space in a field next to the church. Two bands would play during the course of the evening, as listeners tuned-in on their radios. While the children's games, and tour of the church (with the pastor as tour guide), were probably not offered this year, the revised concerts were well received. Even during the pandemic, people were able to hear good music and to enjoy the wood-fired pizza from the safety of their own car/truck. They were also able to feel a sense of community as they gathered outside this rural church.

Another summer event that I recall attending prior to the pandemic, was also in Minnesota. A rural Lutheran church (name unknown) that was located very close to the border with Iowa, offered weekly summer concerts. Upon arriving, one would park one's car/truck in the grassy area near the church. In year's past, (prior to the pandemic) people would arrive early and head to the Fellowship Hall in the basement of the church. There, they could visit with church members and purchase an ice cream sundae. After enjoying the sundae, each guest was given a complimentary bag of popcorn (water and soda were available for purchase). Concert attendees then headed back to their cars. Once inside, they would roll down their windows, listen to the music, and if they enjoyed it, honk their horn! It was fun to hear all the different pitches of the car/truck horns adding to this musical evening. The per-

- ¹⁴The great day of the LORD is near,
near and hastening fast;
the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter,
the warrior cries aloud there.
- ¹⁵That day will be a day of wrath,
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of ruin and devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,
- ¹⁶a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the lofty battlements.
- ¹⁷I will bring such distress upon people
that they shall walk like the blind;
because they have sinned against the LORD,
their blood shall be poured out like dust,
and their flesh like dung.
- ¹⁸Neither their silver nor their gold
will be able to save them
on the day of the LORD's wrath;
in the fire of his passion
the whole earth shall be consumed;
for a full, a terrible end
he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 90:1-8

- ¹Lord, you have been our refuge
from one generation to another.
- ²Before the mountains were brought forth, or the land and
the earth were born,
from age to age you are God.

³You turn us back to the dust and say,
“Turn back, O children of earth.”
⁴For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past
and like a watch in the night;
⁵you sweep them away like a dream,
they fade away suddenly like the grass:
⁶in the morning it is green and flourishes;
in the evening it is dried up and withered.
⁷For we are consumed by your anger;
we are afraid because of your wrath.
⁸Our iniquities you have set before you,
and our secret sins in the light of your countenance.

SECOND READING

*Though we do not know and cannot calculate the day of Christ's return,
we live faithfully in the here and now as we anticipate the day when we
will be given eternal salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

A reading from 1Thessalonians 5:1-11

¹Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³When they say, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But 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. ⁹For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

OPERATION SHOEBOX

Nalani and Greg will be at church during the following times to enable folks to drop-off their shoeboxes:

Mon, Nov. 16: 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Tue, Nov. 17: 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Wed, Nov. 18: 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM
Thu, Nov. 19: 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Fri, Nov. 20: 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM
Sat, Nov. 21: 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Sun, Nov. 22: 12:00 PM - 2:00 PM
Mon, Nov. 23: 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

If these times aren't convenient for you, just call 608-387-2311 and we'll arrange to stop by your house.

CHRISTMAS ANGELS AND GOOD GIFTS

Each household of the congregation should have received information with regard to this project. As of right now, we will decorate on Saturday, November 28, beginning at 9:30 AM. We anticipate decorating the tree, the railings, and erecting the Nativity. Of course, we will ask that folks wear masks and practice social distancing. Should be fun!! Hot chocolate and cookies will be served. You don't have to decorate, just come and supervise from your car if you'd like!!

DRIVE-IN SERVICE

Today marks the end of our Sunday drive-in services. We will hold drive-in services on Christmas Eve, at 2:30PM and 5:30PM. The service will consist of scripture, the story behind some of the Christmas hymns we will be singing, communion, and a homily. Of course, the weather will determine if we will be able to spend some time outside of our cars.

Hymn

Blest Be the Tie That Binds

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
Our comforts and our cares.

We share each other's woes,
Our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.

When we asunder part,
It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart
And hope to meet again.

IN OUR PRAYERS

Katie Wallace, Carla Von Haden, Ruth Johnson, Judy Bever, Alrita Ornes, Lisa Rhodes, Pam Liefke, Doug Path, Chris Chambers, Frank Wendt, Jeff (Scott) DuCharme, Harvey Menn

IN THE MILITARY

Jacob Picha, Todd Nofsinger, Dylan Dougherty, Seth Tormoen, Robert Cale

GOSPEL READING

Jesus tells a parable about his second coming, indicating that it is not sufficient merely to maintain things as they are. Those who await his return should make good use of the gifts that God has provided them.

The holy gospel according to Mathew 25:14-30

Glory to you, O Lord.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] 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.’”

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

Sermon

Have you ever been expected to do something that was outside your comfort zone? Perhaps you were given a responsibility that would reflect on your boss for which you had no prior experience. Perhaps you were promoted to a new position without additional training. Perhaps your boss didn't tell you his or her expectations for an assignment and when you failed, he or she treated you harshly. How did you feel? Worried, anxious, nervous, inadequate?

Now imagine that you are a person who comes from a life of poverty. You are hired by a harsh boss, but you desperately need this job. Your family is poor, and you barely earn enough to pay the household bills with your wages. You never learned to invest money, because you and your birth family always lived from paycheck-to-paycheck. Yet, your boss has surprised you. He has entrusted you with a large sum of money that he wants you to oversee for him. What are you to do?

Our gospel passage for today is one of Jesus' parables. The context is Jesus sharing it with his disciples for their own preparation. When Jesus is no longer on earth, the disciples' faith will be tested, as the servants are tested in this parable. What will the disciples do? Jesus may be away for a long time before his return. How will the disciples respond?

The parable, initially, seems to be about investing money. A wealthy master has given his three servants his money while he is away for an extended period of time. But, there is no mention that the master has told them what they are to do with it. Like our passage from the Book of Amos last week, this passage is not straightforward. It is not about each slaves' ability to demonstrate their investment prowess. It is about something very different.

The parable refers to the master giving each servant "talents" according to their abilities. In the First Century A.D. when Jesus told this parable, a talent was a very large sum of money equivalent to a typical laborer's wages for 15 years. But in the common usage of our English word, "talent," (which was derived from this parable), a "talent" refers to some skill or ability that a person possesses, not money.

Lord of those in need of healing, we pray for all who are suffering in body, mind or spirit, including Katie, Carla, Ruth, Judy, Alrita, Lisa, Pam, Doug, Chris, Frank, Jeff, Harvey, those affected by the Coronavirus, and those we name aloud and in our hearts. Hear us, O god.

Your mercy is great.

Lord of the stranger, stir up holy restlessness in us to extend love to those at the margins. Release our desire for control and open us to learn from the perspectives of others. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Lord of the living and the dead, we give you thanks for all the saints at rest from their labors, Florence and Doug. Rouse us to live by their example, that saints yet to come may also know your love. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, until that day when you gather all creation around your throne where you will reign forever and ever.

Amen.

P: Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as 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.

**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.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Longing for Christ's reign to come among us, we pray for the outpouring of God's power on the church, the world, and all in need.

Lord of the church, ignite your people with the passion of your love. By the fire of your Holy Spirit, unify us across ministries, congregations, and denominations, and refine us to participate in your activity throughout the world. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Lord of creation, we stand in awe at the works of your hands and praise you for the beauty of nature, the driftless area of Wisconsin, State parks, forests, and trails. Bless the earth for your glory and restore its integrity where exploitation has caused ruin. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Lord of the nations, sound forth your justice in the ears of all leaders. Increase concern for those who are most vulnerable, especially as international leaders forge trade agreements and cooperate to end human rights abuses. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Lord of all in need, search out all who cry to you in distress. Scatter the heavy clouds of depression, chronic illness, unemployment, and loneliness with your radiant light. Send us as encouragement and signs of your healing. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Can you relate to the actions of any of these slaves? Depending on their use of the master's talent(s), they will be praised or punished. It is their choice as to what they will do with their talent(s)--"play it safe," "invest for a return," or "go for broke."

The parable also raises questions about the master's judgment concerning the third slave. If the third slave was known by the master to have the fewest skills of the three, why was he given a talent at all? The master could have given the talent to the first or second slave in whom he had more confidence. Why did the master give the third slave even one talent?

The third slave described the master as a "harsh" landlord, who "reaps fields that he did not sow," and "gathers crops and fruit where he did not scatter." We do not know the exact details, but perhaps the master is an absentee landlord and oppressor who has taken land away from tenants who cannot pay their rent. Perhaps the master has used force or power to obtain crops and fruits from their rightful owners. Perhaps the master idolizes money and wealth.

However we envision the master, his actions toward the third slave seem to be contrary to what Jesus would want to be exalting in this parable. The other slaves probably knew their master's harsh traits too, but that did not stop them from doubling the number of talents that each had been given. The master's traits point to his sinfulness--having money as his small "g" god, rather than the Lord God; coveting someone else's land and possessions, and committing murder by beating the third slave to death. All of these are sins that we find in the Ten Commandments.

Over the years, this passage has at times been misinterpreted by some to exalt the wealthy, chastise the poor, and promote classism, discrimination, and even persecution. Per Pastor Libby Howe: (begin quote) The plain reading of the text is that the master is representative of those who are unjust in their business practices. He does not care how the slaves make more money for him, he just wants more. And he doesn't care who knows it. His ways are celebrated by the world and the "joy" into which he welcomes his "faithful" ones is excess wealth gained by systems that perpetuate oppression. There is no shortage of people in the world today to compare him to who are celebrated for their ruthlessness and immorality, because it has made them extraordinarily wealthy. People like this are the reason Jesus could say with certainty "The poor you will always have with you." (Matthew 26:11)

As Matthew's community lived eagerly awaiting Jesus' return, the big question was not if one should be faithful, but to who and to what should one be faithful? Likewise, while we wait for Jesus' return, do we allow ourselves to be defined by actors who are unscrupulous and immoral? Do we, for the sake of getting along and enjoying life say, "Well, that's just the way things are" and do nothing to resist or change injustice?

Whenever the outer darkness and gnashing of teeth is mentioned, I picture Jesus there bringing comfort and freedom. The judgment of the nations at the end of Matthew 25 makes the strongest case of all biblical texts other than the passion story, that we encounter the Divine One in the most despised and mistreated humans.

In Matthew 27:22, Pilate stands before the crowds and asks, "What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" They answer him, "Let him be crucified!" In response he asks them, "Why, what evil has he done?" When we read this parable of the talents today, that is still the question to ask of the master about the third slave. Why? What evil has he done? As that slave is led away, I can hear "Why have you forsaken me?" on his lips.

This is a story of judgment; about throwing people away. We need to see that the ones who reject injustice and are killed for it are the same as the One who hangs on the cross. We can extol their unfaithfulness to a way of life that is death dealing. They never sold out to enter the joy of an earthly master. Instead they followed Jesus and knew the joy of the servant the world never understood (end quote).

Richard Bauckham states, "The parable compares the business of life in the service of God to the business of commerce. It compares the use of all God has given one--not just specific "talents," but all that one has and is--in God's service." (p. 149)

Each of us has been entrusted by God with so much: food, shelter, money, talents, spiritual gifts, all of our God given qualities, and we have the responsibility to use them in God's service. Unlike the harsh earthly master, our master, the Lord God, not only gives and entrusts responsibilities to the rich; but to all persons: rich, poor, and all socio-economic statuses in-between. All have been endowed with God given qualities and responsibilities, yet not all have the training and experience to know how to use their gifts.

The parable gives potential examples of worldly greed, corruption, abuse of power, discrimination, prejudice, classism, and more. It points to our responsibilities, as God's people, working within our own spheres of influence, to do what is good and right and true. It points to our responsibilities to help others, to lift them up, and to encourage them to be all that God wants them to

be. We are to pray for them, teach them how they can use their gifts for God's glory, and help them to gain confidence so that they learn how to use what they have been given wisely, rather than to bury their gifts.

This parable is not about doing good works and using God's gifts to obtain salvation or merit with God. For we know that our salvation is not obtained in this way. It is about doing good works and using our gifts from the Holy Spirit to do God's will. These gifts come from our overflowing hearts filled with praise and thanks to God. They come from God's grace overflowing within us and leading us to greater service to God!

This parable teaches us that we are not to be like the harsh master, but like our heavenly master. God calls us from death to life. Jesus died for us. Through Jesus Christ's death on the cross, and his glorious resurrection, we have new life in him. When we have the light of Christ in our hearts, we are no longer filled with fear like the third slave. We can help the third slaves of this world by promoting justice, equality, and peace for those who are oppressed. When we are in God's service, we lift up people like the third slave. When we are in God's service, we encourage people not to hide the gifts that God has given them. When we are in God's service, we help people earn appropriate wages, provide them with food and shelter, and share with them the gifts that God has given us. For we have received God's grace and been called to use what God has given us, as the Holy Spirit focuses our hearts, souls, minds, and strength on God and service to God. When God's grace fills our hearts to overflowing, we do God's will with abandon for the sake of God's world. Thanks and glory be to God. Amen.

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.**