**MODIFIED SERVICE- Pentecost 24- November 15, 2020**

**ZION EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH, PHLIPSBURG**

Welcome to everyone on this 24rd Sunday of Pentecost, where we continue to gather safely from the comfort of our homes as a reminder of our love for one another.

Our weather this week was definitely more fall like, but it was still nice enough to get out for a walk most days. We give thanks for this time of year!

Today is a special day! It is Esther Hoerle’s 99th Birthday. How amazing is it to live 99 years! We give thanks for Esther and her presence in our lives, and we wish her many birthday blessings! If you have a moment give her a call today or tomorrow, I’m sure she would love to here from you.

Church Council meets this Tuesday for our regularly scheduled meeting. The church reopening scheduled for November 29 with be a topic of discussion.

Our GotoMeeting Coffee hour meets at 11:00, please join us!

Please remember that Zion relies on your continued support each week to meet our monthly expenses. Thank you to all who support and pray for our congregation.

**GATHERING**

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

**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.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray.

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.**

**OPENING HYMN-** Let Streams of Living Justice **(ELW 710)**

1 Let streams of living justice
flow down upon the earth;
give freedom's light to captives,
let all the poor have worth.
The hungry's hands are pleading,
the workers claim their rights,
the mourners long for laughter,
the blinded seek for sight.
Make liberty a beacon,
strike down the iron pow'r;
abolish ancient vengeance:
proclaim your people's hour.

2 For healing of the nations,
for peace that will not end,
for love that makes us lovers,
God grant us grace to mend.
Weave our varied gifts together;
knit our lives as they are spun;
on your loom of time enroll us
till our thread of life is run.
O great weaver of our fabric,
bind church and world in one;
dye our texture with your radiance,
light our colors with your sun.

3 Your city's built to music;
we are the stones you seek;
your harmony is language;
we are the words you speak.
Our faith we find in service,
our hope in others' dreams,
our love in hand of neighbor;
our homeland brightly gleams.
Inscribe our hearts with justice;
your way--the path untried;
your truth--the heart of stranger;
your life--the Crucified.

**WORD**

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

**SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11**

A reading from 1 Thessalonians.

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.

**GOSPEL: Matthew 25:14-30**

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

[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.’ ”

**SERMON**

 As I was reflecting on the gospel reading this week, my thoughts kept going back to a cartoon I watched in my childhood, (okay, who am I kidding I watched Looney Tunes into my adulthood!) The cartoon was entitled Mother Was A Rooster and it featured none other than Foghorn Leghorn, George P. Dog (aka Barnyard Dawg) and a tiny ostrich chick who remained nameless. As you may remember Foghorn and Dawg were archenemies who always seemed to be trying to outdo the other. In this particular cartoon, Dawg decided to fool Foghorn by placing an unhatched ostrich egg near to him while he slept. Foghorn woke in the morning to the egg hatching and out came a tiny bald ostrich. Foghorn believed it to be a chicken and was incredibly proud of his newfound son. He went to show off his pride and joy to Dawg, who took one look at the tiny ostrich and proceeded to insult him causing him to bury his head in the sand. Foghorn reassured the chick, and he popped his head back out of the sand. Dawg again insulted the tiny chick and down went his head again with a familiar plop. Tired of the insults, Foghorn challenged Dawg to a boxing match, hilarity ensued as only Looney Tunes could provide and in the end both Foghorn and Dawg ended up with their heads buried in the sand, with the tiny ostrich asking “where did everybody go?” He then plops his head back down into the sand as well to join the others.

         Now, you may be wondering to yourselves….where is Pastor Leanne going with this sermon? And what does this have to do with our readings today? Have I been out of the pulpit for too long?

        Bear with me for a second, you see, I could not help thinking of how the poor ostrich chick burying his head in the sand parallels the third slave burying the talent in the dirt. They were both afraid. They were both afraid of risk. And then I began to wonder, how often are afraid we to risk? How often do we live in fear? How often do we bury our heads in the sand or bury the talents that God has invited us to share? Are we misusing the abundance that God has given to us? Are we living our lives to the fullest as disciples and followers of Jesus Christ? So many questions…

         Perhaps a little background on the gospel reading will help us to reflect on these questions. Our parable this week continues to explain the kingdom of heaven, just like the parable of the 10 bridesmaids last week and the parable of the goats and sheep next week on our final Sunday of the church year. Jesus told these parables in the last few days of his life, for in the coming days he would be beaten, arrested, and put to death on the cross.

         In our parable today, Jesus is preparing the disciples on how to live on in the presence of God until the end times when Jesus returns in joy and glory. And Jesus prepares them in what I like to call true Jesus style using allegory and hyperbole. He gave each of the slaves a number of talents equal to their ability and comfort levels. Jesus knew his beloved children well, and he gave to them in abundance! You see, a talent in antiquity was an enormous amount of money, anywhere between 15-20 years' worth of wages. In modern times a single talent would be worth 1.5 million dollars; God provided abundantly for the slaves.

         So, the first two slaves took the talents and took a risk and doubled their efforts. The third slave took his single talent and buried it. Now burying the talent would not have been out of the ordinary in antiquity, it was regarded as a security measure. It was safe and completely without risk…well as long as one did not forget where they buried it! It is sort of like us putting our money in our mattress. After giving the talents, the master left, representing Jesus’ Acension. There was a delay in his return, which represented the *Parousia,* the end times, the unknown but expected return of Jesus Christ. Upon his return, he is met by the first two slaves who excitedly share that they have doubled their amount of talents, they risked and were rewarded. They took an opportunity to lead and grew in faith. The master is pleased with their efforts and welcomes them into the joy of God; he welcomes them to the wedding feast.

         The third slave arrives and returns the single talent to the master and explains why he buried it. He was fearful of the master, he was afraid of the risk, which proverbially left his head buried in the sand. Jesus is unhappy with the slave and calls him wicked and lazy, and he goes on to state that “for to all those that have, more will be given, and they will have abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for the worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:29-30). Now I do not know about you but reading this left me feeling disturbed and a little bit angry. Where is the Jesus of compassion? Where is the Jesus of grace and mercy? The third slave did not steal the talent, he did not spend it foolishly, the master lost nothing, but yet he is displeased with the slave. The judgement was real!

         Our parable today teaches us and speaks of risk and invitation. Jesus invited each of the slaves into a deeper relationship with him. He invited them into the kingdom of heaven, into the great abundance that only God can provide. The first two slaves accepted the abundance of God’s gift, they took a risk and grew in faithfulness and discipleship. They lived and loved in the image of God. The third slave let his fear overcome him. He was afraid to risk and blind to Jesus’ invitation, even though he was given an abundant gift as well. God’s grace was all around him, but he could not see it. His head was buried in the sand like that of the tiny ostrich chick.

        As we continue to live in these uncertain and strange times of pandemic, injustice, and political strife, may we be like the first two slaves, may we risk greatly and be faithful stewards of God’s abundant grace. May we love and serve one another deeply and courageously. May we take chances and get our hands dirty in helping one another, in building one another up, in stepping out of our comfort zones to help those who live in poverty and with injustice. May we trust one another as the master trusted his servants. May we keep alert and stay awake, as our reading from 1 Thessalonians reminds us this morning, knowing that the Lord will arrive like a thief in the night and that we to will be invited to enter into the joy of the master. Let us keep our heads out of the sand and accept the invitation to live into the grace and mercy of a loving God, whose abundance and love knows no end. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY- As Saints of Old (ELW 695)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c10rDteTKtk>

**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. *A brief silence.*

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. Empower us to risk greatly in your abundant love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Lord of creation, we stand in awe at the works of your hands especially the brilliant and colorful sunrises and sunsets that brighten our days. We praise you for the beauty of rivers and lakes, mountains, hills and valleys. 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. Enliven us to be in unity with one another instead of division and lay out paths of peace in lands where violence and war rage on. Increase support for those who are most vulnerable. 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 and anxiety, chronic illness, injury, unemployment, and loneliness with your radiant light. Send us as encouragement and signs of your healing. We remember especially this morning Eddie, Elaine, Suzie, Ruth, Donelda, Lynette, Barb, Sarah, Alea, Stephanie, and those we name in the stillness of 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. 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.**

**PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD**

Let us pray.

Praise and thanks to you, holy God, for by your Word you made all things: you spoke light into darkness, called forth beauty from chaos, and brought life into being. For your Word of life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

By your Word you called your people Israel to tell of your wonderful gifts: freedom from captivity, water on the desert journey, a pathway home from exile, wisdom for life with you. For your Word of life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

Through Jesus, your Word made flesh, you speak to us and call us to witness: forgiveness through the cross, life to those entombed by death, the way of your self-giving love. For your Word of life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

Send your Spirit of truth, O God; rekindle your gifts within us: renew our faith, increase our hope, and deepen our love, for the sake of a world in need. Faithful to your Word, O God, draw near to all who call on you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. **Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER**

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.**

**SENDING**

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

**BLESSING**

May the God of all creation, in whose image we are made, who claims us and calls us beloved, who strengthens us for service, give you reason to rejoice and be glad! The blessing of God. Sovereign. +Saviour, and Spirit be with you today and always. Amen.

**DISMISSAL**

Beloved of God, go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

**SENDING HYMN- Oh, Happy Day When We Shall Stand** **(ELW 441)**

1 Oh, happy day when we shall stand
amid the heav'nly throng;
and sing with hosts from ev'ry land
the new celestial song,
the new celestial song.

2 Oh, blessed day when Christ shall come
and show himself as Lord,
and thousands meet in their new home
which Jesus has prepared,
which Jesus has prepared.

3 Oh, what a mighty rushing flood
of joy and love and peace
will roll down over us with good
and blessedness and grace,
and blessedness and grace.

4 O Lord, your grace is ev'rything;
your love has made us free
to stand among the saints and sing
the glory that we see,
the glory that we see.

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