

Worship Resources - Staying True - <https://youtu.be/RLkt3OSmMNk>

22nd Sunday of Pentecost, Year A,

1st November, 2020

Micah 3:5-12 CEV / Matthew 23:1-12 CEV

Prelude *I Will Sing the Wondrous Story*

Music by Peter Bilhorn - played by church musician Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/QCiqbosFNSo>

Intro/Call to Worship

When we stand at the edge of fear and worry, God invites us to step into the waters of faith and trust. When we stand at the edge of the world's pain and need, Jesus invites us to step into the land of humble service. When we stand at the edge of our hunger and thirst: the Spirit invites us to sit at the Table of grace.

I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

Our tradition at Olympic View is to begin our service greeting and wishing each other peace and sharing the love of Christ with each other. This morning as we gather on All Saints Day, let's reflect on those saints we've encountered in our own lives, and how we can work to be that same presence of Christ's love and peace in our own journeys of faith, as we watch this short, but poignant reflection on what it really means to be a saint.

Reflection video *All Saints Day - Archdiocese of Sydney*

<https://vimeo.com/367661101>

We tend to think of saints as spiritual heroes Regularly seeing visions or reaching mystic heights We could never approach. But the feast of All Saints tells us not to lose heart. We might not move into a hospital to care for plague victims Or a prison to care for those on death row.

But we can each find a place to serve God And needy humanity whom He puts in our way. Sanctity isn't the monopoly of the few It is the God-given destiny of all:
Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP

Invocation

God, companion and guide,

we would be lost without your direction—wanderers in the wilderness of our own making. We praise you for dealing so graciously with your people in the past, when you guided them to freedom and a promised new life. We are heirs of that promise fulfilled in Jesus, our Redeemer and Lord. Through him, you have established for us a permanent direction for our lives and as we dwell in him, our lives are blessed with fruitfulness. Holy God, may this time of worship be a joyful response of praise and thanksgiving for all that you have done, for all that you are doing, and for all that you will continue to do for us and all people through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

We light a candle today to represent the Spirit burning within us, and among us, guiding our time together. (light candle) Amen.

In our reading from Micah today, the prophet reminds us the importance of being true to our faith commitments, to leading an ethical life. Let's think about how true our own choices are as we hear these prophetic words.

First Testament Reading Micah 3:5-12 CEV

You lying prophets promise security for anyone who gives you food, but disaster for anyone who refuses to feed you. Here is what the Lord says to you prophets:

“You will live in the dark, far from the sight of the sun, with no message from me. You prophets and fortunetellers will all be disgraced, with no message from me.”

But the Lord has filled me with power and his Spirit. I have been given the courage to speak about justice and to tell you people of Israel that you have sinned.

So listen to my message, you rulers of Israel! You hate justice and twist the truth. You make cruelty and murder a way of life in Jerusalem.

You leaders accept bribes for dishonest decisions. You priests and prophets teach and preach, but only for money. Then you say, “The Lord is on our side. No harm will come to us.”

And so, because of you, Jerusalem will be plowed under and left in ruins. Thorns will cover the mountain where the temple now stands

A Time of Prayer

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a specific request to be included in our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at: vicarglenn@gmail.com, and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.

Joys and Concerns

This morning, as COVID 19 cases continue to spike around the country, let's pray for all those affected by this terrible disease, and may God move in the hearts of all of us to take the precautions to ensure the safety of all.

Let's also remember those who struggle emotionally with the isolation and lack of contact these times have caused. May they find peace and comfort.

As we approach Election Day this week, let's pray for peace and compassion on all sides, and may God move in the hearts of all to seek love and understanding, not hate and divisiveness.

Let's bring these concerns and others in our lives to God together in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

We say we want you to walk with us, beloved God. But we are not comfortable with the path that is set before us. We would like a smooth, newly paved road, with clear markings and bright bold signs, telling us what to do; warning us of what lies ahead. But the journey of discipleship is like a rough mountain path. There are rocks, ruts, dust, dirt, holes. There may be wolves or robbers at any turn. We don't know if we dare to risk discipleship if it means struggle.

But you have called us to rely on your guidance and direction. You remind us that God has never failed us yet. We have been brought to new vistas and new opportunities of service that we never would have encountered on the safe road. And this is because in all our trials, you do walk with us.

In our troubles and concerns, Lord, we need your presence and comfort. We have so many fears and anxieties. Our hearts break and are burdened with the illnesses and grief of loved ones. We hear the news of disaster and catastrophe in this

world and wonder how much of this we can stand. In our troubles and trials, Lord, remind us that we have your strength on which to rely. As we have faithfully brought before you the names of loved ones in need of your healing and comfort, remind us that we too are recipients of that same healing love. Strengthen us. Walk with us, Lord. Lift us high and give us confident strides as we follow your will and your path. **Amen.**

In our reading from Micah today, the prophet reminds us the importance of being true to our faith commitments, to leading an ethical life. Let's think about how true our own choices are as we hear these prophetic words.

Gospel Lesson Matthew 23:1-12 CEV

Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:

The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law are experts in the Law of Moses.

So obey everything they teach you, but don't do as they do. After all, they say one thing and do something else.

They pile heavy burdens on people's shoulders and won't lift a finger to help.

Everything they do is just to show off in front of others. They even make a big show of wearing Scripture verses on their foreheads and arms, and they wear big tassels[a] for everyone to see.

They love the best seats at banquets and the front seats in the meeting places.

And when they are in the market, they like to have people greet them as their teachers.

But none of you should be called a teacher. You have only one teacher, and all of you are like brothers and sisters.

Don't call anyone on earth your father. All of you have the same Father in heaven.

None of you should be called the leader. The Messiah is your only leader.

Whoever is the greatest should be the servant of the others.

If you put yourself above others, you will be put down. But if you humble yourself, you will be honored.

Scripture Video **Matthew 23:1-12**
Jesus Condemns The Pharisees & Teachers
Of The Law | Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wa2tXb83Zr>

Message ***Staying True***

I once heard a story about a young lawyer who was setting himself up in his first private practice. As he sat in his office, which was basically bare except for his desk with a telephone on it and a bookcase filled with important-looking legal books, he wondered how long it would be before he got his first client. Then, as luck would have it, he saw a man across the road cross the street and stride towards his front door. Feeling nervous and wanting to make a good impression on the working class man, he quickly picked up the phone receiver and began talking to an imaginary client on the phone. The man, now standing in the office in front of his desk, waited several minutes while he concluded his conversation with this very important client. Finally after ending the conversation, he looked up at the man, now directly in front of his desk and with an air of superiority said to the man "Can I help you?" The man looked at the young lawyer and without missing a beat said "I'm from the phone company. I'm here to connect your phone." An amusing story to be sure, but it highlights an important point in today's gospel reading from Matthew. He points out the hypocritical behavior of the religious authorities of his day, behaving in much the same way as the young lawyer acts in this story. Like him, they liked to be seen in a certain light, "sitting on Moses' seat," having the position of power and authority. They certainly didn't hesitate to take advantage of the perks that came with that authority, like seats of honor at gatherings, in the synagogue and the public square. In today's world, they would always be sitting in the VIP section, or the skybox at sporting events. To be sure, they wore the outward symbols of that position: the longer tassels, the bigger phylacteries. And just to clarify what a phylactery is, it's a little black box with a piece of scripture inside. You may have seen pictures of Hassidic Jews with this on their foreheads, held on by being wrapped around the arm with a leather strap. These were men who took advantage of their position as the heirs to Moses, as the religious authorities of their day. But that begs the question, what is wrong with being recognized with respect and authority?

James Hunter in his book "The Servant" presents a powerful picture of what it really means to be a leader/servant. He shares: leadership is ultimately rooted in our will.

Not forcing our will on others, but demonstrating our will to serve. There is a big difference between leading through power and leading through authority. Many people can simply force people to do what they want because they have the power to make them. However, few people like to be forced to do anything. Eventually such “power driven leadership” destroys relationships. On the other hand, some have the ability to lead through authority. Authority is different than power. Power is something you have and force on people. Authority is something you gain – it’s given to you by the people you lead. How does one gain authority from those they lead? Only through service and sacrifice.

When people see that you have their best interests at heart, when they see you are willing to sacrifice and serve them they will be willing to follow. That’s servant leadership, that’s authority. So, if that respect and authority is earned and deserved, nothing is wrong with that. But the problem here is that these men were in that position to guide and assist people in their own faith struggles. But instead of helping them to find comfort and support in their journeys of faith, this group only added to their burdens.

It helps to understand what’s going on by knowing a little about the events that had led them to this place. The controversy was being obedient to the “Law of Moses”, or the Torah. In the time before the Romans destroyed the Temple and scattered the Jewish population of Palestine, the 600 odd laws developed from the Torah to ensure personal piety and integrity applied primarily to the religious authorities of the Temple. However, by the time Matthew is written, the Temple is gone, and the Jewish people are now scattered across the Gentile Roman world, and the Pharisaic leaders want some way to ensure that these people maintain their unique Jewish identity and not simply adapt and conform to Gentile ways and customs. So they began to teach that all people must follow every rule that they do, governing every minute detail of everyday life. For the Pharisees, this is easy because they have been trained and raised in this life, and it is their vocation.

But for the average woman and man, this put a terrible burden on living an ordinary life. Different dishes for different food, exact measurements for how much you can walk on the Sabbath, who you can eat with, who you can speak to, how you conduct business, the list goes on and on. In addition, there were growing tensions between the synagogues and the new church in Christ spreading across the Greco-Roman world at the same time.

Matthew's followers are right in the middle of all this. It's clear that Matthew was focused on a primarily Jewish audience and for those followers, this struggle would be real. Do we follow the laws and the Pharisees as well as Christ they would have wondered? So it's no coincidence that in Matthew, Jesus creates common ground between the Jews who follow Christ and those who have yet to convert. He starts out by validating the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees, telling his audience to follow their instructions. The Torah and ethical teachings of the Old Testament have merit, so don't write them off, in other words. But he points out that the problem is the disconnect between what they teach and how they behave. Now Jesus talks about the Jewish leaders but let's keep in mind that Matthew would have been read by the leaders of the early church as well. Power structures rose pretty quickly in that arena too. Priests, bishops, and a hierarchy appeared almost out of thin air in the first century.

There's a variety of lessons we can draw from this story. First, your walk and your talk should match. Matthew is contrasting mere talking with actually doing. A good illustration of this comes from the life of President Theodore Roosevelt. During one of his political campaigns, a delegation called on Theodore Roosevelt at his home in Oyster Bay, Long Island. The President met them with his coat off and his sleeves rolled up. "Ah, gentlemen," he said, "come down to the barn and we will talk while I do some work." At the barn, Roosevelt picked up a pitchfork and looked around for the hay. Then he called out, "John, where's all the hay?" "Sorry, sir," John called down from the hayloft. "I ain't have time to toss it back down again after you pitched it up while the Iowa folks were here." Teddy knew the importance of appearances, as did the religious authorities of Jesus' time. As I mentioned earlier, the Pharisees dumped all these laws, which were virtually impossible to follow in a normal daily life, on the laps of all the average people, yet did nothing to try to understand their impact or help people find a way to have a life of integrity without losing the joy of living life.

Which brings us to another lesson. The burden of the law is crippling. Trying to keep up with all those rules and regulations governing every minute detail is making the common life miserable. Yet we know that part of Christ's mission is to clarify and simplify the law, to bare it down to its most basic components, "To love the Lord your God with all your mind, body and soul, and to love your neighbor as yourself, on this rests all the law and the prophets." A law based on showing love and compassion is the much easier yoke to bear in following Christ than trying to follow the priestly code. It is a life focused outwards, instead of obsessing over personal piety. The fasting called for in the law that Jesus promotes comes from Isaiah 58, "to

loose the chains of injustice, to set the oppressed free, to share your food with the hungry, to provide the wanderer with shelter, to clothe the naked.”

This is the lighter yoke of Jesus, not the false piety of the Pharisees. For them, leading a pure pious life meant all the people living out the Priestly code to the letter. Now don't misunderstand, Jesus is concerned with purity as well, but he differs greatly in how that is defined. He rightly understood the difficulty in performing all those codes, and to try to do so he felt was misdirected. He grasped the concept that the original laws of Moses were meant to guide how we live together as a community, how we relate to each other. For him, the key traits were love, mercy, and the desire to lift others up in humility, particularly those in lower states than yourself. So how do we measure up? Which measure do we use to guide our actions?

There's a story of a man who sat down to supper with his family and said grace, thanking God for the food, for the hands which prepared it, and for the source of all life. But during the meal he complained about the freshness of the bread, the bitterness of the coffee, and the sharpness of the cheese. His young daughter questioned him, "Dad, do you think God heard the grace today?" He answered confidently, "Of course." Then she asked, "And do you think God heard what you said about the coffee, the cheese, and the bread?" Not so confidently, he answered, "Why, yes, I believe so." The little girl concluded, "Then which do you think God believed, Dad?" The man was suddenly aware that his mealtime prayer had become a rote, thoughtless habit rather than an attentive and honest conversation with God. By not concentrating on that important conversation, he had left the door open to let hypocrisy sneak in.

Like that man, we have our own conversations and decisions to consider as well. Are we legalistic, caught up in obsessing over every moral code of Old Testament law or are we focused on love and compassion for others? And what about our sense of power and entitlement? Do we like to wear the garments of success and privilege or do we embrace humility? Do we nod and agree with the pastor on Sunday then go back to seeking the best swag we can get during the week? These are the questions we need to keep in mind, and use to guide our actions in our day to day life. It's not rocket science. In all things, are we thinking about others besides ourselves? How often do we use the pronoun “them” when we should be thinking “us?”

Our culture abounds in this kind of hypocrisy these days on these same concepts. How much do we hear in the news about the power plays in Washington, about certain leaders who revel in their own vestments that highlight their self-importance

and privilege. And what, as Christians are we to do? Part of the problem with so many empty seats in churches these days is people don't see us walking our talk. We talk about love and justice on Sunday, but in the public arena biblical legalism rules the day. Hypocrisy is a turn off for most people. We need to get back to the source, to actually focus on Christ as Christians. I pray that we choose to follow the priestly code that Christ gives, as the priesthood of all believers and start living the truth we claim, Amen.

Call to Serve.

As we continue to seek to be a place of compassion and support to our community, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or online donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry that seeks to promote the growth of God's shalom around us. This morning, as Annie shares the following song, let's give some thought as to how we can better walk in faith and truly reflect the gospel we promote.

A Time for Reflection

Reflection on the Word [video] *Lord Make Us Servants of Your Peace*

Harmonization by Jeffrey Rickard

performed by church musician Annie Center,

used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

played by church musician Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/3zMFlqxOFFk>

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

We offer our whole selves to you, O God, creator of everything. It is a joy and a blessing to share our gifts with one another. As we offer these things for the work of your church, help us to be mindful of all that we can do together as the Body of Christ. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Wisdom continues to call to us, to lead us back to God. Listen to the voice of wisdom from our ancestors in the faith. Understand the ways of the saints who lived their lives as examples for us. Follow Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, and know that you are forgiven, loved, and restored. Continue to seek God's ways. Incline your heart to wisdom and justice, and live into God's righteousness and peace. Amen.

As we extinguish this candle, carry its divine spark into your lives this week, sharing God's love and light with all you encounter. Amen.

Postlude

Like a Wandering Aramean

Text and Music by Delmas L. Keeney

performed by church musician Annie Center,

used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

<https://youtu.be/69G-vbwAxB4>