

Worship Resources - Hopeful <https://youtu.be/gPUUq99RBCs>

23rd Sunday of Pentecost, Year A,

8th November, 2020

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 CEV / Matthew 25:1-13 CEV

Prelude *Since Jesus Came Into My Heart,*

music by Charles H. Gabriel,
played by church musician Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/1wqRqrbY2Rc>

Intro/Call to Worship

We come to hear the stories of other people in another world long ago.
We come to hear the stories that are also about us today in this place.
God, give us ears to listen. eyes to see, hearts to accept. Amen

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.

This morning, let's begin our time together listening to the old spiritual Keep your lamp trimmed and burning. Based on our gospel reading from Matthew today, as we listen to this moving piece, let's think how we stay prepared of followers of Christ, and how we use our lights to keep hope in a better future alive in today's world.

Reflection video *Keep Your Light Trimmed and Ready*

Blind Willie Johnson
posted to YouTube by Heart Poet 76

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prVjqD2prV8>

Invocation

Holy God,

We hear echoes of your Wisdom in Christ Jesus. The One you sent to dwell in our midst and lead us to abundant life. Keep us alert to the call to follow, ready to respond with justice and joy in your holy moment, which is always Now.

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 Paul's letter to the Thessalonians today, we hear of the hope we all have in Christ. As we listen to these words, let's think about where we seek hope in our daily lives.

Epistle Reading 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 CEV

My friends, we want you to understand how it will be for those followers who have already died. They won't grieve over them and be like people who don't have any hope.

We believe that Jesus died and was raised to life. We also believe that when God brings Jesus back again, he will bring with him all who had faith in Jesus before they died.

Our Lord Jesus told us that when he comes, we won't go up to meet him ahead of his followers who have already died.

With a loud command and with the shout of the chief angel and a blast of God's trumpet, the Lord will return from heaven. Then those who had faith in Christ before they died will be raised to life.

Next, all of us who are still alive will be taken up into the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the sky. From that time on we will all be with the Lord forever.

Encourage each other with these words.

Scripture Video 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18

What To Expect When The Lord Returns

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqofHKktT54>

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, let's continue to keep Matthew Schultz in our prayers as he continues to struggle with his health treatment and the stress resulting from his ongoing condition. Let's bring these concerns and others in our lives to God together in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

Oh God, as for you, You did not keep earth waiting When darkness covered her shores And chaos hurried to destroy.

As for you You did not keep silent When you knew a word Was all the difference between life and death.

As for you You did not hide When discoveries threatened to change The world we thought we knew.

As for you You did not keep away When wanderers walked the earth In search of home and purpose.

As for you You did not lie still When the faithful few departed And even prophets were afraid.

As for you You did not leave us But came as one of us In the hour of deepest need.

As for you You did not let death contain you But rose in garden and city street Love and hope in your wake.

So to you is due our praise Our thanks, our hearts To you is the glory now and always From all peoples and places of earth

As for me As for me, God You know me better than I know myself, As for me I would serve the Lord Put off waiting Find my voice. Enter life in its fullness, Offer hope where there is none, Take the hand of friend and stranger, So for the courage to do all this Hear my prayer

As for me and my household, my church, my community. As for us together though often apart, You know our strengths and weaknesses, Our gifts and shortcomings. As for us we would serve our God In the small things, Of friendship, Kind words, Visiting the sick, Caring for the grieving. So for the love to do all this. Hear our prayer

As for us we would serve our God In the big issues Of poverty, War, Violence, Greed. Giving where there is need. Speaking for those who cannot be heard. Challenging the system that divides your world. So for the patience to do all this. Hear our prayer

As for you God Come again to cold hearts, Weary bodies, Confused minds. To fill with spirit. And renew with life. That service will be true. Love be real And glory be to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Now and always Amen

In our gospel lesson this morning, we are reminded of the importance to be ready and prepared for the work at hand. As we hear these words from Matthew, let's think about our level of preparedness, and what the work at hand really is for us today.

Gospel Lesson Matthew 25:1-13 CEV

The kingdom of heaven is like what happened one night when ten girls took their oil lamps and went to a wedding to meet the groom.[a]

Five of the girls were foolish and five were wise.

The foolish ones took their lamps, but no extra oil.

The ones who were wise took along extra oil for their lamps.

The groom was late arriving, and the girls became drowsy and fell asleep.

Then in the middle of the night someone shouted, "Here's the groom! Come to meet him!"

When the girls got up and started getting their lamps ready,

the foolish ones said to the others, "Let us have some of your oil! Our lamps are going out."

The girls who were wise answered, "There's not enough oil for all of us! Go and buy some for yourselves."

While the foolish girls were on their way to get some oil, the groom arrived. The girls who were ready went into the wedding, and the doors were closed.

Later the other girls returned and shouted, "Sir, sir! Open the door for us!"

But the groom replied, "I don't even know you!"

So, my disciples, always be ready! You don't know the day or the time when all this will happen.

Scripture Video Matthew 25: 1-13 *A Story About Ten Girls*

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjCNY63TXHo>

Message – Hopeful

This has been quite a week in our national journey, hasn't it? For many of us, it's been quite the wild ride of an election. Certainly, there was much anticipation that this likely wouldn't be so cut and dry, and we should have been prepared for some anxiety and stress. But even the best plans don't always eliminate the worry about what might happen if things don't go like we hope. I myself made plans with a friend to disconnect from all news and social media on Election Day in an attempt to avoid getting caught up in the stress of the uncertainty that would be dramatized by those platforms. Yet by early morning, we both had caved to Twitter and Google for updates. After all, it's human nature to want to know what's coming next, to be able to have a sense of control and preparation for any possibility.

When we feel we have some level of control, we feel more confident, and even hopeful in what may come next. But what happens when we find ourselves in places where we have little control? Like the anxious events of this week, how do we find hope in those places where we have little control, where we are stuck waiting and watching to see what happens? What do we do when our best laid plans do not convey the security we hoped for?

In our gospel lesson this week, Jesus tells the story of a wedding party to illustrate what it can be like to live in this liminal space of uncertainty. A rather fitting illustration, I would think. Anybody who has ever been involved with planning and organizing a wedding knows that it is far from a controlled, stress free experience. Even before my time as a minister, I had many opportunities to be part of the wedding parties of good friends, to assist in the planning and execution of those major life events. And while the bride and groom do their best to carefully plan every minute detail, the reality is that something will undoubtedly go wrong. In every wedding I've ever been a part of, that is the one constant. It may not be a major thing, but something will not happen exactly as planned. That's actually part of my premarital counseling now, to advise to be prepared for the unexpected, because it will happen.

In Jesus' time, the scale of wedding celebrations was much different than what most of us think of in our culture, making the possibility of issues even greater. It was customary for the groom to prepare a place for his bride. Usually, it was 12 months' time—going to his father's house, preparing a room for him and his wife. Often this meant adding onto the house itself, or making some renovations to the house. But sometimes it was a separate house entirely. Now, while 12 months was customary, it could be sooner...it could be later. No one knew when he would come to claim her, so they needed to wait. They needed to be ready. They needed to be prepared.

They did know he would likely come in the middle of the night, as was tradition. It's at this point in the story that Jesus picks up his parable. The bridesmaids are waiting in the middle of the night. They are to be prepared to greet the bridegroom when he arrives, and escort him to the wedding ceremony. And that's an interesting detail in itself. Usually, when the bridegroom's presence would be made known, the bridesmaids would escort the bride to him.

Jesus changes their roles, having the bridesmaids escorting the groom to the bride. This is just one hint of Jesus telling us about the nature of our God—because it's always God who comes to us; always Christ who comes to His bride, not the other way around. At any rate, because they didn't know the precise day or hour of his arrival, they needed to bring along lamps with oil to keep it lit.

I think when we hear talk of "lamps" in the Bible, we often have the image of a small thing, a little bigger than the size of your hand, with a handle to carry it. Those were for indoor use, though. The lamps mentioned here would be better described as torches on long poles. These sorts of torch-lamps were for outdoor use; especially for such processions. They would trim the strips at the end, drench them in oil, then light it. That would keep it lit for about 15-20 minutes—so they'd need to do it again and again and again. A significant amount of oil would've been needed to stay lit for the length of the procession.

The wedding party had a job to do to prepare for this ceremony! But, as the story goes, not all of the bridesmaids were prepared. And when the bridegroom did arrive, boy were they surprised. "Give us some of your oil," the foolish ones demanded. When they finally made it to the wedding, they were shocked when the groom—the man who had invited them to be part of his wedding party in the first place—denies them. He shuts the door in their face and says, "I never knew you." Scary words for a Gospel, "good news" reading. "I never knew you." And so, this parable serves a warning, a cautionary tale for us. So, we are always a bridesmaid, always THE bride—the church—actively preparing for the bridegroom's arrival. Such is the nature and hope of our faith. We live in the promise that like the bridegroom, God is at work, planning the ceremony and preparing a place for us. Yet we live in the anticipation and uncertainty like the wedding party in our story, and often in the anxiety of that uncertainty.

This week in bible study, we talked a lot about finding hope in our faith when it doesn't seem like there is any hope to be found in our worldly situation. It can be tough, yet that is the promise of the bulk of the stories in scripture. In all those tales of suffering and adversity, the one constant is God at work, bringing salvation and resolution in the end. Our job is to be prepared, to stay faithful to the journey we are called to, to keep our lamps oiled and trimmed, no matter how dark and hopeless the night may seem.

The events of this week only highlight the hopelessness and anxiety we can feel in this life of waiting. Yet part of keeping our lamps lit is also giving hope to those whose lights have gone out.

Like the members of a wedding party, we are not in charge of ensuring all goes to plan, but we are called to do our part in the ceremony. We are called to keep our lamps lit, to offer the hope and promise of a bright new day at the end of a dark night. In our own national journey, we have the promise of new leadership, of a change from the divisiveness and hate that have plagued us for years.

As God's light in this world, we can choose to seek healing, reconciliation, and positive change, or we can let our wicks burn up and our oil run dry, and give in to the pessimism and malaise. Being in a wedding party is not just dressing up and looking pretty, it's being part of something bigger. Our part in this event is finding the hope in our God at work in this world, and sharing that work and hope with others.

What choice will you make in the coming days and months? While there is promise in the change to come from this week's events, there will also be much work to be done. Will you keep your lamp lit and join in the work, or will you let it go dark? I hope we all find ways to share the love light of our bridegroom, and always keep our lamps lit. 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 seek hope for ourselves in the gospel of Christ, and how we can offer hope to others in a world so often lacking in hope.

A Time for Reflection

Reflection on the Word [video]

Blessed Assurance,

music by Phoebe Palmer Knapp,

played by church musician Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/4IRhdoWrCN8>

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

God, we have come, and given generously of our gifts.
Take, bless and multiply them
so that they may be a blessing in your world.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Keep your lamps filled and your hearts open, ready for the call of God.
Go in peace, counting on the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the sweet communion of* the Holy Spirit.
Amen!

Postlude

Bring Many Names,

music by Carlton Young,
performed by church musician Annie Center,
used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

<https://youtu.be/7QvldGiAsyY>