

Worship Service - "How Far?"

3rd Sunday in Lent, Year C,

20th March, 2022

Colossians 3:1-11 NSRV / Luke 12:13-21 NRSV

Prelude

He's Been There

Music by Jelaire Richardson, played by Annie Center

Gospel Opening (Video)

We'll Understand It Better By and By

performed and posted to YouTube Oakwood University Church.
Director Dr. Jason Max Ferdinand

Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace

I Know That My Redeemer Lives

Music by Lewis Edwards, arr. by Susan Henry, played by Annie Center

Opening Hymn (Video)

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty **37**

an 1863 translation by Catherine Winkworth of a German hymn, "Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren" written by Joachim Neander and published in 1680. Performed by the Choir of St George's Chapel, Windsor. Video background by Christian Bodhi from Pixabay. Posted to YouTube by Chet Valley Churches

Call to Worship (Responsive)

One: Trust in God, and know God's ways;

All: For God leads us in the way of right-living.

One: Trust in Christ, and know Christ's ways;

All: For Christ leads us to eternal life by putting to death the ways of this world.

One: Trust in the Holy Spirit, and know the Spirit's ways;

All: For the Spirit binds us together, and sends us forth to do God's work in this world.

One: Come, worship God, Three-in-One, in whom we trust our hearts and lives.

All: Come, worship God, who calls us into beloved community.

Invocation

Holy God, we gather this day to give thanks for your steadfast love and to experience afresh your desire to gather all people into communities of safety, justice and peace. With Christ as our guide, we seek to grow into “a new self” in your image: generous, compassionate, welcoming. Baptized into Christ, we seek to love all of our sisters and brothers with Christ’s inclusive love that sees beyond difference and extends the hand of peace to strangers. Send your Spirit among us and inspire our imaginations and wills in the things that make for peace, for we pray in the name of the One who was called the Prince of Peace, Amen.

Epistle Reading - Colossians 3:1-11 NSRV

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry).

On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient.

These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life.

But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth.

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices

and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.

In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

Hymn (Video) *In Christ There is No East or West* 306

adapted and performed by Paul Demer, text by John Oxenham,
music: African American spiritual, violin: Rachel Bundy percussion:
Chad McCutchen, **used with permission**

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

God of enduring love When our steps in life are unsure, When the way to go is unclear, Guide our path

God of enduring love When life throws us curveballs, When things look bleak, Strengthen us.

God of enduring love When we find ourselves surrounded by too much stuff, When we want more and more to satisfy us, Draw our hearts to you.

God of enduring love When we lost our hope, When we grieved and grieved some more, Hold us in your arms.

God of enduring love When we are drowning in a sea of debt, When we are overwhelmed by the tasks of work and life, Lift us up into your hands of love.

Our gracious, eternal God, we bow to you who are from everlasting to everlasting. We thank you for that seed of uneasiness which you have placed within us which causes us to hunger and thirst for an inner peace which endures. Yet we often wander on life's journey and fail to find peace. And we know that our lack of peace is due to the many ways in which we misdirect our inner discontent.

- We set our sights on money and would figuratively build bigger and better barns.
- We keep our eye upon those who are more successful and we become consumed by envy.
- We carry resentment that someone else has more than we and we rail against life's unfairness.
- We long for a security which money might bring but fail to see that there is no way money can cure our inner discontent.

Bend your ear to us this day. Provide your healing touch and help us to redirect our search for security and peace.

- Help us always to remember that it is you who lend us life and that life is a gift.
- Help us to remember that the purpose of life is always greater than knowing that we have enough for tomorrow.
- Help us to remember that our resources also are only a gift and that we are only caretakers with a responsibility for the well-being of our sisters and brothers.
- Help us to remember that true riches do not lie in abundance but in being rich toward you who alone offer a peace which passes all understanding.

O God, we ask that you would transform us and provide us victory over all greed and avarice. Amen

Gospel Reading

Luke 12:13-21 NRSV

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."

But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?"

And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly.

And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?'

Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.

And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'

But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Message – How Far?

Quite a full barn of crops, isn't it? Looks like that farmer had a good season and has plenty left over to put up for the winter. Or she'll have quite the windfall when she goes to Market. It makes me wonder what is going through this farmer's mind when he or she sees such a productive result to his or her effort. Certainly some words or themes come to mind: pride, gratitude, a sense of accomplishment, security, maybe even relief. After all, farming is a very up and down occupation. Some years you work hard, have a good crop, and sell it when the price is good and you can rest easy knowing that you and your family are secure for the next little while. But then you can have other years where the weather doesn't cooperate, your yield is small, and you find the market flooded with product and the price drops and you don't even recoup what you spent to produce the meager yield you did have. So when times are good and you experience success, is it wrong to be proud of your efforts? Should you not be able to enjoy the fruits of your labor and rest easy for a season or two?

On the surface, our parable this week seems to suggest just that. We have a farmer who has been very successful, so much so that his barn won't hold all the crops that he's been

fortunate enough to produce. He's almost giddy at finding himself in such an advantageous predicament that he begins to plan how he can remedy that situation, as well as looking forward to all the benefits his success will afford him, only to discover it all comes to naught as his life will be forfeited that very night. What are we to make of this? Is success a bad thing? Are we not to enjoy the fruits of our labor?

Walking in the Christian faith always presents a problem of dualism. We live in a real world with real needs that are met with real resources. Most of us need to work a real job to earn real money to pay for real shelter, real food, real clothes, and all the associated bills that go with that real life. Yet as followers of the risen Christ, we have the expectation of something more and are expected to be something more. This worldly life is just the transition period to an eternity of promise to come, we are to live in this world as if that world is already present around and through us. As people of faith, we are not to put our trust in those worldly items that we rely on to supply our needs: our jobs, our money, our stuff. Yet it is all those things that enable us to live and live abundantly, or so we tend to think. Quite the conundrum, isn't it?

But is all the “stuff” really the problem that Jesus is addressing in this parable? Or is it the main character's perspective that is the problem? From the text, his only thoughts seem to be on his “stuff,” on what he feels he has worked hard for and earned for himself. He is obsessed with ensuring that “stuff” is protected and secure, and he daydreams about all the other “stuff” he can buy with those gains. There is no thought about why he had the favorable conditions that enabled him to be so successful; no thought about his neighbors who may not have been more fortunate. So much of his time has been devoted to working hard to bring all this about that he now defines himself by his wealth and the many benefits that wealth will bring to him. It's not hard to do.

When working is such a focus of what we do, it can be all too easy for that work to define who we are. How do we identify ourselves when we meet other people? After the initial exchange of names, what is usually the next question? What do you do? We assign part of our identity to the jobs we do, and often then relate our value to that identity. We try for the better, more prestigious position, strive to make more, have more. We worry that we won't have enough. We try to live as Jesus taught, but we continue to build bigger barns. We continue to worry about not having enough for ourselves. We continue to make our own plans for the future while often our siblings on the streets go in need. We too, like the man in our parable, can lose sight of where it all comes from, who ultimately provides

for our success. Too often we forget that all this “stuff,” while certainly enabled by our efforts, ultimately is provided to us by the blessings of God.

Our Creator, makes it possible for those seemingly random circumstances come together for us to get that good job, to have that good season on the farm, or to get that nice house at a price we can afford. All that “stuff” that we are blessed with is provided in part for our benefit, but it isn't really ours to claim. We are called to be stewards of the resources we are blessed with.

In our parable, the farmer was only focused on himself, and how he could keep and enjoy the blessings he stewarded all to himself. There is no mention of using that wealth to the benefit of others, or of giving thanks and seeking discernment about how he was meant to use the blessings he was given. Like all of us at times, he got sidetracked into defining his life by his role in this world, and lost sight of the kin-dom that draws near, and the Creator who ultimately provides for all our needs, if we let God direct our efforts.

Max Lucado, in his book *More Stories for the Heart*, relates the following illustration. "A little boy is on the beach. On his knees he scoops and packs the sand with a plastic Shovel into a bright red bucket. Then he upends the bucket on the surface and lifts it. And, to the delight of the little architect, a castle tower is created. All afternoon he will work. Spooning out the moat. Packing the walls. Bottle tops will be sentries. Popsicle sticks will be bridges. A sandcastle will be built. Then switching to a different scene. “Big city. Busy streets. Rumbling traffic.

A man in his office. At his desk he shuffles papers into stacks and delegates assignments. He cradles the phone on his shoulder and punches the keyboard with his fingers. Numbers are juggled and contracts are signed and much to the delight of the man, a profit is made. All his life he will work. Formulating the plans. Forecasting the future. Annuities will be sentries. Capital gains will be bridges. An empire will be built.

Two builders of two castles. They have much in common. They shape granules into grandeurs. They see nothing and make something. They are diligent and determined. And for both the tide will rise and the end will come. Yet that is where the similarities cease. For the boy sees the end while the man ignores it. Watch the boy as the dusk approaches. As the waves near, the wise child jumps to his feet and begins to clap. There is no sorrow. No fear. No regret. He knew this would happen. He is not surprised. And when the great breaker crashes into his castle and his masterpiece is sucked into the sea, he smiles.

He smiles, picks up his tools, takes his father's hand, and goes home. " The grownup, however, is not so wise. As the wave of years collapses on his castle he is terrified. He hovers over the sandy monument to protect it. He blocks the waves from the walls he has made. Salt-water soaked and shivering he snarls at the incoming tide. 'It's my castle,' he defies. The ocean need not respond. Both know to whom the sand belongs...

Children can teach us a lot about sand castles. Watch them and learn. Go ahead and build, but build with a child's heart. When the sun sets and the tides take -- applaud. Salute the process of life, take your Father's hand and go home" It's a problem of dualism. Is our focus on the kin-dom of God in the here and now, or is it on the "stuff" of this world, and our role in getting that "stuff." Our illustration points out not only the way in which God provides for us, but also in the fleeting aspect of this worldly life we put such value in. Both our texts in Luke and Colossians highlight this need for the proper perspective. Yes, we live in a real world and we work to build our castles in the sand there. But it's important for us to realize that it's not our sand, and while we benefit from that work, the work is not what's important. It's the people and the mission, the community within and without the faith that matters. It's lifting up God's values and priorities and joining in the work God is doing in this world while we are here, using the resources we've been blessed with.

Paul lists a variety of vices to avoid in his letter to the Colossians to help us gain the proper focus. One list highlights some of those aspects of a worldly life that can take our focus from God and the kin-dom that draws near, those facets that can lead us to make it all about ourselves and our own selfish wants such as unhealthy desires and greed. The second list focuses on attitudes that pull us apart from our neighbors and community: anger, wrath, malice, and slander. We always face this duelist struggle, making a living and surviving in the earthly world while struggling to keep a Jesus perspective.

I'd like to close this morning with a little story about a man named Henry Kaiser who owned a construction business. While building a levee along a river bank, a violent rainstorm flooded the earth-moving machinery and destroyed the work that had been done. As Kaiser approached the work site to assess the damages, he found his crew bemoaning the mud and the buried earth-moving equipment. As his workers surrounded him, Kaiser asked, 'Why are you so glum?' 'Can't you see the disaster?' they asked. 'Our equipment is covered with mud.' Smiling, Kaiser asked, 'What mud?' 'You must be kidding. Look around you. We are surrounded by a sea of mud. How can you say you don't

see any?’ ‘Well,’ said Henry Kaiser, ‘what I see is a clear blue sky filled with bright sunshine. I’ve never known mud to sustain itself against the powerful sun. Soon it will be dried up and then we will be able to move our equipment and start over. Furthermore, our attitude will not only affect how we see reality but will also affect the reality itself. Sun or mud, the choice is yours.’

The difference between sun or mud is a matter of perspective. Again, what we expect to see we see. This story involving Henry J. Kaiser reinforces our choice to look at any situation from more than one point of view.” What will you see the sun or the mud?

The effects of the events of recent years on our personal lives and lives in community could lead us to feel stuck in the mud. It would be easy to focus on the negative changes we perceive in this new world in which we find ourselves. What perspective will we choose? To only see the mud and muck, or to see the “Sun” and all that can be accomplished in that new light. As we go into our week and continue our reflective Lenten journey with Jesus, let us think how we can keep more of our focus on the values of God's kin-dom while we live our lives in this world. How can we witness to a different reality to those around us, a reality in stark contrast to what's valued or perceived in our culture? A reality not based on greed, selfishness and exclusion, and negativity but one based on kin-dom values of charity, love and inclusion and welcome. May we find our way to be witnesses to a better perspective. Amen.

A Call to Serve (resources)

The God who has blessed our lives calls us to store our riches with God.
In thanksgiving and in faithfulness, let us share our gifts and offerings.

A Time for Reflection - *Let There Be Light* (Video)

Music by Hubert Parry; Arr. by Mike Carson, played by Annie Center

The Prayer of Thanksgiving (resources)

Loving and merciful God, we offer these gifts in gratitude for all the ways in which you have blessed our lives. We offer these gifts to remember that you are the source of our hope and our peace. With these gifts we commit ourselves to serve you and to work for peace in this world. Bless these gifts that they might be used in ministries of restoration and reconciliation. Amen.

written by Frances R. Havergal and Henri A.C. Malan,
performed and posted to YouTube by David and Noelle Music

BENEDICTION (resources)

Go now as those raised with Christ,
wondering at God's great love
and telling the story of your salvation.
Be on your guard against all kinds of greed
and set your minds on the ways of heaven.

And may God reach out to you and nourish you;
May Christ Jesus renew you in the image of your creator;
And may the Holy Spirit lead you with cords of kindness and love.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
...In the name of Christ. Amen.

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Postlude

Come Unto Jesus

Music by Orson Pratt Huish; arr. by Tiffany Hobson, played by Annie Center