

Worship at Home for November 15 2020

This is Stewardship Sunday, so the scripture and reflection here are also what was shared in our podcast for this week. Additional prayers and links to music are unique to the service that follows.

You may choose to read right through this document, stopping for your own reflection at any time, or only read the prayers or the scripture or reflection. You might read with family or friends, or alone. Links will take you to music that may enhance your experience as you move through the worship, but you might choose to visit them later, or not at all. Feel free to share this with anyone who might be interested.

If you'd like to comment or have a question, please call or email me directly:
416-951-7911 minister@applewoodunited.ca

In the Spirit

Rev. Joanne

Centering Prayer

Holy One, Giver of all,
help us to receive your presence, your Spirit,
and your enduring love and strength today. Amen

Opening Music: "God Whose Giving Knows no Ending"

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

God, whose giving knows no ending,
from your rich and endless store:
nature's wonder, Jesus' wisdom,
costly cross, grave's shattered door.
Gifted by you, we turn to you,
off'ring up ourselves in praise:
thankful songs shall rise forever,
gracious donor of our days.

Skills and time are ours for pressing
towards the goals of Christ, your son:
all at peace in health and freedom,
races joined, the church made one.
Now direct our daily labour,
lest we strive for self alone:
born with talents, make us servants
fit to answer at your throne.

Treasure too, you have entrusted,
gain through pow'rs your grace conferred:
ours to use for home and kindred
and to spread the gospel word.
Open wide our hands in sharing,
as we heed Christ's ageless call.
Healing, teaching and reclaiming,
serving you by loving all.

Opening Prayer

You, God, always challenge us to be more –
more justice-seeking,
more compassionate,
more loving,
more risk taking,
more deeply faithful,
more deeply in relationship with you.
Give us the tools we need to be open wide to both
your challenges and your grace.
We pray in the name of Jesus,
your justice-giver, your compassion-bringer,
your love incarnate, your risk-taker,
and our path to faith and sacred relationship.
Amen

Scripture Matthew 25:14-30 from The Message

"It's also like a man going off on an extended trip. He called his servants together and delegated responsibilities. To one he gave five thousand dollars, to another two thousand, to a third one thousand, depending on their abilities. Then he left. Right off, the first servant went to work and doubled his master's investment. The second did the same. But the man with the single thousand dug a hole and carefully buried his master's money.

"After a long absence, the master of those three servants came back and settled up with them. The one given five thousand dollars showed him how he had doubled his investment. His master commended him: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.'

"The servant with the two thousand showed how he also had doubled his master's investment. His master commended him: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.'

"The servant given one thousand said, 'Master, I know you have high standards and hate careless ways, that you demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound down to the last cent.'

"The master was furious. 'That's a terrible way to live! It's criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least? The least you could have done would have been to invest the sum with the bankers, where at least I would have gotten a little interest.'

“Take the thousand and give it to the one who risked the most. And get rid of this “play-it-safe” who won’t go out on a limb. Throw him out into utter darkness.’

Reflection

This is a favourite stewardship scripture, but it was not actually chosen by our stewardship team for this Sunday, but was assigned as part of the Revised Common Lectionary that we follow, which gives readings for each Sunday in the church year. I’m sorry to say that I don’t really think this parable is about money at all – instead, it is about the high risk venture of being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Those who heard this parable first would not have thought this parable really about money – the amount that Jesus gives is so exorbitant, far more than the thousands that are mentioned in *The Message* paraphrase above. Talents were a measure of money, but not in coin. They were actually slabs of metal – weighing sometimes over 100 pounds, and one talent would be equal to fifteen years wages. This is, I think hyperbole, describing a super-jackpot, and so it would likely have been immediately apparent that this parable is not really about money at all – but it sure is an attention-grabber!

It’s not really about ‘talents’ either, as in the God-given gift and skills each one of us receive, even though our present meaning of the words actually derives from the Greek used in this passage.

I think it this passage is really about faith. It is about knowing that in our relationship with God, we are given faith and the ability to grown that faith and share that faith – which includes God’s grace and forgiveness – in amounts we can barely fathom. When we share that faith, we take a risk, when live it out, the returns are enormous.

How do we share that faith, especially in these when we are not gathering? Our church neighbours are not seeing a stream of people arriving for church on Sundays, and the little yellow bus is not making its run. We share that faith when we help one of our friends access the podcast, or send them a copy of the Worship at Home, when we make a phone call to be in touch with someone we haven’t seen for months, when we say a prayer.

We share that faith, and grow that faith, when we take time to read an article about someone who is making a difference, or remember all those who are still working on the front lines of this pandemic, or when we make personal decisions that grow God’s love and justice in the world.

We know what happens, at least in this parable, when we hide that faith, when we don’t even try to grow it or share it, and take the attitude that, “no, I’m just fine where I am,” when we bury our faith like the servant buried the treasure entrusted to him. When we act in these ways, we run the danger of becoming distant from God, distant from the light of love and grace that could illuminate our lives and our spirits – distant from our God who gives to us so generously. So take a risk with your faith! Take the risk to share with a friend that you have a faith life, and that you find comfort and meaning and purpose in your involvement with Applewood United

Church, and your relationship with God. In these times when we cannot gather in our church building, taking a risk might mean giving – giving to support the work of Applewood United Church even though it doesn't always look like the that work is on-going. We are working hard to stay and keep connected, we are still caring for the building, we are still reaching out.

Take a chance on faith, take a chance on God, take a chance on your own ability to grow your faith even in trying times.

And as always, live your life fully as God would call us to live: with hope, with faith, with reckless and risky action to share that faith in a world that needs it desperately. Amen

Music: "What Shall the Lord Require of You"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Bnn_pnqaMo

Prayers of the People

Loving and giving God, today we offer our thanks, we offer our prayers for others, we offer ourselves in service to you.

We thank you for all that brings us joy – our families, our friends,
brilliant autumn leaves tossed in the wind,
the warmth of our homes on chilly evenings,
the warmth of our Applewood United Church community.

We thank you, God, for what brings us hope in these days
of closed church buildings and restricted meetings .

We are grateful for the ongoing work of faith leaders and civic leaders,
for the efforts of researchers and health care workers,
and for your unfailing love for us all.

We give thanks that we have opportunities to continue your work
through our lives, our choices and our decisions

despite pandemic restrictions, despite distances and challenges.
Remind us God, that our time, our talents, and our financial resources
are still of vital importance to our faith family here in Applewood,
but also to other ministries touched by what we give.

We know, Holy Comforter, that there are those who struggle to know joy
and find hope today, and so we lift our prayers for all who are weary
of distancing, or mask-wearing, or ZOOM visits and meetings.

We pray for those who are struggling to pay their bills, or to find work,
or to feed their families.

We offer our prayers for those who are grieving the loss of physical contact, grieving the loss of time spent with friends and family, or grieving the loss of those they loved , and we remember especially the family of Vera Hughes, Charlotte Watson grieving the loss of her sister Phyllis, and Rev Joanne and her family grieving the loss of her sister Judy.

Guide us, Life-giving God, into a spirit of generosity that allows us to give meaningfully and joyfully of ourselves and our resources to support our faith community, our neighbours far and wide, and bring your love to life. Amen

Closing music: "You Shall Go Out with Joy"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6JoQTrX2ic>

Blessing

Go with God's love,
to be the generous people of faith this world needs.
Go with Christ's compassion,
to be the caring people this community needs.
Go with the Spirit's energy,
to be the risk-taking people God calls us to be.
Amen