

At Home Worship
November 22, 2020
First Presbyterian Church-Sweetwater
Christ the King

Find a Sacred Space

Sit comfortably, perhaps with something warm to drink, where you can look out on the beauty Of God’s creation today. Read aloud or quietly to yourself, or as a family share the various parts of the service.

Greeting - The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Call to Worship and Prayer of Praise

Let us gather together all who await the return of the Lord!

Let our hearts always be ready to stand before the throne of God!

For the Lord will come again and God's judgment will be real.

And we are each called to share God's love while there is yet time.

So let us lift our voices in song and praise for God's abiding love!

Blessed be the name of the Lord!

When the final day comes, Lord, it will be like a test. However, it will not help to stay up all night and wait, because we will not know which night it will be. No one will have the inside track in order to gain the advantage. Ready or not, we are all in this together. The Holy Spirit is our tutor, available all day, every day, all night, every night. And the best way to learn is by doing. We have the idea. Love God and love your neighbor. Now we need to practice. And as we practice we can know we are ready, Lord. Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn “We Gather Together” # 336

1. We gather together to ask the Lord’s blessing; He chastens and hastens his will to make known; the wicked oppressing now cease from distressing. Sing praises to his name; he forgets not his own.
2. Beside us to guide us, our God with us joining, ordaining, maintaining his kingdom divine; so from the beginning the fight we were winning; thou, Lord, wast at our side; all glory be thine!
3. We all do extol thee, thou leader triumphant, and pray that thou still our defender wilt be. Let thy congregation escape tribulation; thy name be ever praised! O Lord, make us free!

A Time of Confession and Assurance

Lord, we confess we are not ready for Your return. Too often we have heard the cries of the hungry and not fed them, or we have heard the pleas of the needy and walked past them, or we have known of the sick and imprisoned and not cared for them. Forgive us, Lord, and help us from this day on to openly share Your love with everyone.

(silent prayer of personal confession).....Amen.

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. May the God of mercy, who forgives us all our sins, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life. Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn “We Give Thee but Thine Own” #708

1. We give thee but thine own, whate'er the gift may be; all that we have is thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from thee.
2. May we thy bounties thus as stewards true receive, and gladly, as thou blessest us, to thee our first fruits give.
3. The captive to release, to God the lost to bring, to teach the way of life and peace: it is a Christ like thing.
4. And we believe thy Word, though dim our faith may be; whate'er for thine we do, O Lord, we do it unto thee.

Surprised Saints

Matthew 25:31-46

Over many decades, the little magazine Reader's Digest has been a reliable source of humor drawn from everyday life. In one issue several years ago, a nurse wrote in to tell about what was then a new piece of equipment. The nurse worked in a gynecologist's office and they were beginning to use a battery-operated device called a mini-dop on expectant mothers. This device allowed them to listen to the heartbeat of their babies. The problem with these early devices was that sometimes they picked up interference from the radio or television set in the waiting room. What one doctor discovered quite to his dismay was that these devices could also pickup CB radio signals. Imagine his surprise when one day he had the device to the abdomen of one of his patients when a voice came through as clear as day. The voice asked, “How are things out there?”

Life is full of surprises. Some of these surprises are not too nice but some of these surprises can be wonderful.

Jesus tells us that there will come a time when the saints of God will be surprised. And it will be wonderful. It will be at the final judgment. On that momentous day, says Jesus, the King of all creation will come to His saints and here is what He will say, something they were not expecting.

“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” Surprise! We have so much to be thankful for even in the middle of a pandemic! Stop and think about it. We are so blessed, we are blessed so that we may be a blessing to others.

It's like a charming Christmas legend that comes out of medieval times. According to the legend, on Christmas Eve the Christ Child wanders throughout the world looking for places where he will be welcomed. Those who love him those who hope he will visit their homes demonstrate this by placing lighted candles in the window to invite him in. No one knows what he will look like when

he comes. He might be a beggar. He might be blind. He might come as a poor and lonely child. So devout Christians welcome into their homes everyone who knocks on their door on Christmas Day. To turn anyone away may mean rejecting the Christ Child.

There are several lessons in this familiar text from Matthew's Gospel. The first is that we need to be careful how we treat other people, particularly those in need. Be careful how you deal with others, for they may be Jesus in disguise.

Dr. Kenneth Carter tells about a member of his congregation. This man is involved in a local homeless ministry. He says that his motivation for helping the homeless comes from his relationship with his brother. His brother, who lives in the Pacific Northwest, suffers from a psychological illness which sometimes leads him to paranoid delusions. These delusions have caused him to become one of the homeless. He travels from one homeless shelter to another. His brother explains that when he serves the homeless men in that ministry, he imagines that one of them is his brother.

That's how we need to view those in need, as our brothers and sisters in Christ. Saints of God care about other people. This is not out of fear of divine punishment. Rather it is because the Spirit of Jesus lives in our heart. We see others through his eyes and that makes all the difference.

I heard a man telling about the ministry of the Sojourners Neighborhood Center in Washington, D.C., his hometown. This center stands just one-and-a-half miles from the White House. On a given day three hundred families stand in line outside the center to receive a bag of groceries which is critical to getting them through the week.

Just before the doors are opened and all the people come in, all those who help prepare the food join hands and say a prayer. The prayer is often offered by Mary Glover, a sixty-year-old black woman who knows what it means to be poor and knows how to pray. She prays like someone who knows to whom she is talking. She has been carrying on a conversation with her Lord for many, many years. She first thanks God for another day, "Another day to serve you, Lord," she says. And then Mary Glover may pray something like this, "Lord, we know that you'll be coming through this line today so, Lord, help us to treat you well."

This is the first lesson from our text. Be careful how you treat anyone you meet. They may be Jesus in disguise. But there is something else that is important to note.

Saints of God have a heart for those at the bottom of society. This has always been so. We care about those less fortunate than ourselves.

One of the most influential people of the last century was a man named Albert Schweitzer. Most of us know his name.

Schweitzer was one of the most brilliant students in Germany. He was outstanding in philosophy. He was one of the greatest of all organists, and in particular played Bach as no one else could play him. But at the back of his mind there was a feeling that would not be stilled. He once said that as far back as he could remember, the thought of all the misery in the world had deeply troubled him. He came to believe that he did not have the moral right to take his happy youth, his good health and

his ability to work as a matter of course. He believed that we must all take our share of the misery which weighs so heavily upon the world.

So Albert Schweitzer decided to give everything up and to study night and day to be a doctor. He went as a missionary to Lambarene in Africa where he established a hospital. One day a poor African man who was in much pain was brought to his hospital. "Pain is a more terrible lord of mankind than even death himself," Schweitzer once said. Schweitzer laid his hand upon the man's head and said: "Don't be afraid. In an hour's time you will be put to sleep and you will feel no more pain when you wake up." When the operation was over, the man discovered Schweitzer waiting there beside the bed. The man looked around, and suddenly said again and again and again: "I have no more pain! I have no more pain!" Schweitzer wrote, "His hand feels for mine and will not let it go."

This was all the payment that Albert Schweitzer needed. Schweitzer had a tender heart for the suffering of the world. He saw Christ everywhere, in everyone. He gave his life to relieve the suffering of others. Saints of God have a heart for those at the bottom of society. Christ didn't come for the well, but for the sick. That's our calling too.

Christ may not be calling us to devote our lives in full-time service to the hurting like Schweitzer, but he does call us to do something. Whether it is visiting a nursing home, or helping in a soup kitchen, or simply taking an interest in a needy family of your acquaintance, to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to be serving those less fortunate than ourselves. This is something we do not do for them, but for ourselves. It is easy for us to insulate ourselves from those in need. Then we grow callous to their need. Even more deadly, we begin to imagine that we somehow deserve our good fortune, and our hearts grow cold and hard. We forget our purpose for being here and we become miserably self-indulgent.

Many, many years ago a man moved into a small town. His little house was near the railroad tracks. Every morning he noticed an elderly lady walking along the tracks picking up something and putting it into a bag. The man got curious. He went to a small grocery store nearby and asked the owner about this lady. "Oh, that's the widow Jacobs," said the grocer. "Every day she comes half way across town to pick up the coal that is spilled on the tracks when the early morning train runs through town."

"But there hasn't been a steam locomotive using coal on these tracks for years," replied the new resident.

"That's right," said the store owner. "When the steam train stopped running, old Mr. Simpson who runs the hardware store was concerned that the Widow Jacobs would no longer have coal to heat and cook with. He knew she was too proud to take charity, so he decided to get up early every morning, take a bag of coal and drop it along the tracks. The Widow Jacobs still thinks the steam train runs by here every morning. I think Old Mr. Simpson has been doing that for about 5 years now."

A few lumps of coal dropped along a railroad track each day. It's not much to do, but it's something. I believe God calls each of us to do something to make life better for someone else. That's what this text is saying to us, isn't it? "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink . . ." It doesn't say that you solved the problem of

world hunger. It doesn't say that you found a way to provide clean drinking water for entire nations. If God is calling you in these directions, this is great. But Christ isn't calling most of us to change the direction of world affairs. But he is calling us to do something for somebody. "I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." It's not much, but you can make a difference in someone's life.

And when you do that, something quite extraordinary happens people begin seeing Christ in you.

Think about it! When you serve those less fortunate, you are doing it unto Christ. But when you are helping others, they see Christ in you.

Pastor and popular writer Barbara Brown Taylor tells an insightful story that comes from the Jewish community.

It is a tradition among Jews who celebrate Passover of saving an empty chair at their Seder feast for Elijah, the prophet who is supposed to bring the news that the Messiah has finally come. At a specified moment in the meal, the door is flung open for Elijah to enter and claim his seat. Everyone present falls silent with anticipation. For thousands of years pious Jews have opened that door, and for thousands of years nothing at all has happened at least nothing that the eye can see.

One Hasidic story tells of a pious Jew who asked his rabbi, "For about forty years I have opened the door for Elijah every Seder night, waiting for him to come, but he never does. What is the reason?"

The rabbi answered, "In your neighborhood there lives a very poor family with many children. Call on the man and propose to him that you and your family celebrate the next Passover at his house, and for this purpose provide him and his whole family with everything necessary for the eight days of Passover. Then on the Seder night Elijah will certainly come."

The man did as the rabbi told him, but after Passover he came back and claimed that again he had waited in vain to see Elijah. The rabbi answered, "I know very well that Elijah came on the Seder night to the house of your poor neighbor. But of course you could not see him." And the rabbi held a mirror before the face of the man and said, "Look, this was Elijah's face that night."

The rabbi was very wise, and we should heed his message. Followers of Christ have a heart for those in need. We see Christ in the poor and in the suffering of the world. But when we enter into their need and try to serve them, something extraordinary happens. They also see Christ in us! Surprise. "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Thanks be to God for allowing us to be His hands and feet in the world! Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn “Count Your Blessings”

1. When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed, When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one, And it will surprise you what the Lord hath
done.

Refrain:

Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your blessings, see what God hath done;
Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.

2. Are you ever burdened with a load of care? Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
Count your many blessings, ev'ry doubt will fly, and you will be singing as the days go by.

Refrain:

Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your blessings, see what God hath done;
Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.

3. When you look at others with their lands and gold, think that Christ has promised you His wealth
untold; Count your many blessings, money cannot buy your reward in heaven, nor your home on
high.

Refrain:

Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your blessings, see what God hath done;
Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.

4. So, amid the conflict, whether great or small, Do not be discouraged, God is over all;
Count your many blessings, angels will attend, Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.

Refrain:

Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your blessings, see what God hath done;
Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.

Blessing

Now may the Lord of peace give you peace at all times and in all ways. The grace of the Lord
Jesus Christ be with all of you. 2 Thessalonians 3:16,18