

Morning Worship for Remembrance Sunday 8 Nov 2020

Opening Words

We are here because we have been called.
We have been called in love to bear witness to
the light of the world.
The light shines in darkness and in places of
death.
We give thanks for the opportunities we have to
bear witness to the Light of Christ.
As we worship in this place that is both Holy and
Profane
we praise the God of Peace and Life who works in
and through his people.

Jenny Hunt

Hymn: I Vow to thee my country

I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love:
the love that asks no question, the love that stands
the test,
that lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;
the love that never falters, the love that pays the
price,
the love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

And there's another country I've heard of long ago,
most dear to them that love her, most great to them
that know;
we may not count her armies, we may not see her
King;
her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;
and soul by soul and silently her shining bounds
increase,
and her ways are ways of gentleness and all her paths
are peace.

Cecil Arthur Spring-Rice

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Prayer

The city has no need of sun or moon to shine
upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its
lamp is the lamb.

By your light shall the nations walk.

Its gate shall not be shut by day and there shall
be no night.

By your light shall the nations walk.

Nothing unclean will enter, not those who
practise abomination or falsehood.

By your light shall the nations walk.

The river of the water of life flowing in the midst
of all.

By your light shall the nations walk.

The tree of life, its leaves for the healing of the

nations.

By your light shall the nations walk.

Every accursed thing will disappear.

By your light shall the nations walk.

We shall see your face.

By your light shall the nations walk.

And the night shall be no more; we will need no
lamp or sun.

By your light shall the nations walk.

Creator of all,

we give you thanks and praise that you have
called us as witness to your light.

Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us
so that we and all your children shall be free and
the whole earth live to praise your name.

AMEN

Jenny Hunt

Reading: Matthew 25: 1-13

You came into this world to bring true peace – a
right relationship between all people and God,
between individuals, and between nations.

Lord you are the Prince of Peace.

You are the Light of the World.

In you alone can we find peace and in the doing
of your will is our peace.

Grant us your peace in our hearts and may this
peace go out from us to touch others. May we be
true peace-makers.

Lord you are the Prince of Peace.

You are the Light of the World.

Empower us with the gift of discernment that we
may know your will,

make right judgements, and be able to stand
firmly on the side of lasting truth

and goodness according to your will amidst the
confusion of today's social issues.

Lord you are the Prince of Peace.

You are the Light of the World.

Give us the strength to renounce our own
comforts and securities.

May there be a fair distribution and use of all
resources.

May there be justice and freedom from
discrimination for all peoples.

Lord you are the Prince of Peace.

You are the Light of the World.

Let us join in saying the Prayer of St Francis:

**Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
where there is hatred, let me sow love.**

**Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light,
and where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that
I may not so much seek to be consoled as to
console.
To be understood, as to understand.
To be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
AMEN**

(Women's World Day of Prayer 1985)

Sermon

There is anecdotally a story of a lecturer at a famous seminary full of young men who gave a sermon on the parable that we read today in Matthew's gospel. And when the lecturer reached the climax of his sermon, he yelled at his listeners "Young men, tell me, would you rather be in the light with the wise virgins - or in the dark with the foolish virgins?" Well you can imagine, what the response of 24 red blooded young males would have been to that question.

The parable told by Jesus is of 10 bridesmaids, or virgins, waiting for a bridegroom to arrive. And when the groom arrives only 5 are ready to receive him. Jesus sets the parable in the context of a wedding that his listeners would be familiar with. How traditional it was for weddings to happen like this, we do not really know. But we get a picture of how the wedding proceeded by how Jesus tells the story.

At this wedding the bridegroom would go to the house of the bride for the ceremony, and be escorted there by the bridesmaids. The bridesmaids would carry lights that would light the way to the bride, but also would illuminate the groom, so that everyone could see how handsome he was. There would be no set time for the wedding ceremony to begin, so the time the bridegroom was to arrive would not be known.

But once the groom was inside the house, we are told the door was shut for the duration of the

festival. So those bridesmaids who turned up late, missed the whole thing.

In telling the story this way, many have come to read this as Jesus being the groom, and the bridesmaids being the church, the Christians. And the story is told in relation to the Second Coming of Christ, and those who are ready for that day when the groom arrives and those who are not.

It is important to remember that this is what Matthew and the many others were expecting to happen. Matthew, and the Jewish nation, were waiting for a Messiah to come and establish God's reign in the world, and for Matthew, Jesus was this Messiah. But at the time Matthew's gospel is written, some fifty years after Jesus death, the Jews are still being persecuted by the Romans, their temple has been destroyed, and there is no sign of rescue. So Matthew looks forward to a time when Jesus will come again and establish God's rule and reign on earth.

Matthew says "The bridegroom was a long time in coming" and it is this delay by the bridegroom, that the early Christians wrestled with. They expected Jesus to come back quickly and rescue them, but time was passing on and there was still no sign of rescue.

Matthew address his gospels to the Jews and to the followers of Jesus. These are for him the bridesmaids. And there are those Jews who had not accepted Jesus as the Messiah, and these no doubt were the foolish ones. And the people of the way, the ones who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah, were ready to greet and recognise the bridegroom when he comes again.

There is an urgency in Matthews teaching - hurry up - learn that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah - because he is coming again soon, and those that have not accepted him, will not be part of God's Kingdom when it is established.

But what does this parable say to us today some 2000 years later. And especially what does it say to us on this day of Remembrance?

I offer you three things today that I feel this parable teaches us:

The first is that even though the ten bridesmaids were regarded as the same - half of them were different. When it comes to it, only five of them were prepared and ready. It is possible to have a lamp that looks good, but has no oil in it. And in our churches, it is possible to act as a Christian, to do all the churchy things, to come along to worship, to go to the meetings - but when it comes to it, there is no oil in our lamps.

Remember that childrens hymn - give me oil in my lamp, keep me serving. Keep me loving. Keep me praying. If we are not doing these things, if our lamps are empty, they will not give light.

We cannot illuminate Christ for others to see, if we are not loving, or serving or praying, or living out the Christian life. Just going to church, just turning up, is not good enough. We need oil in our lamps, we need a real relationship with Christ.

Otherwise when we meet Christ, and ask him to open the door for us, he will say "I don't know you"

The second thing I think we can learn is that there are some things you can't borrow and there are some things money can't buy

The bridesmaids asked to borrow some oil and were refused. Seems a bit harsh, doesn't it. Is this really what Christians should be like, not sharing what they have with those who have not, is this really a picture of what the kingdom should be? But let us not forget that Jesus tells this parable not to teach us how to share, but about being ready.

We cannot live off the faith of others. We need to possess a faith for ourselves. It is no good saying, tell me what to believe, give me some of your faith - we have to own it, we have to work it out for ourselves.

I see people in Christian book shops buying reams and reams of books, and that's Ok, but I wonder if sometimes people are really just trying to buy their faith off the shelf. We live in age where we want quick fixes, ready meals, fast food, tailor made products.

We cannot do this with our faith. We cannot expect to go out and buy our faith, or borrow it from someone else. It's no good saying - I'm with him - what he says goes for me. She seems the kind of Christian I want to be - what she says is what I think. Sure, others peoples view will resonate with ours, but there are no shortcuts. We need to wrestle with Scripture, and with life for ourselves, to have a real relationship with Christ for ourselves.

The third thing we learn is that there are times when it is too late. For Matthew the urgency was real - there was a deadline coming up, and if you weren't in then you were out. I think for many in the churches the urgency behind this second coming has fallen into the background.

So when I read this reading, and especially today on this day of Remembrance, when we remember those whose lives were lost in war over the past century, I think it would be appropriate to remind ourselves that there is an urgency for us to work for peace in the world.

Jurgen Moltmann says: "When the atomic bomb was invented and dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, it was not just the Second World War that was ended. The whole human race entered its end time as well. That is meant in an entirely non-religious sense. The endtime is the age in which the end of humanity is possible at any time."

He goes on to say through the possibility of global nuclear war, the human race as a whole became mortal. No human being could survive the nuclear winter that would follow a major nuclear war. The lifetime of the human race is no longer guaranteed by nature as it has been up to now; it must be ensured through human beings through deliberate policies of survival.

The American elections this week remind us just how important it is to make the right decisions about who makes decisions in places of power. It is too easy for leaders to be provoked into moves that lead to war and not peace. The very real threat of war is never very far away. And as Christians, we should be at the forefront of those who are promoting a peaceful society and our

common humanity. We cannot let our lights fade and become complacent in this, because the day will come when it will be too late.

Daily Herald journalist Mea Allan wrote those words in 1939 as she witnessed the introduction of universal blackout.

"I stood on the footway of Hungerford bridge across the Thames watching the lights of London go out. The whole great town was lit up like a fairyland, in a dazzle that reached into the sky, and then one by one, as a switch was pulled, each area went dark, the dazzle becoming a patchwork of lights being snuffed out here and there until a last one remained, and it too went out. What was left was more than just wartime blackout, it was a fearful portent of what war was to be. We had not thought that we would have to fight in darkness, or that light would be our enemy."

For many the Second World War was fought in darkness, both physical and spiritual darkness. Vera Lynn's song "When the lights go on again over all the world" must have seemed so poignant.

So let us as God's people today, continue to keep our lights lit. Let us burn with love and continue to work for peace between brother and sister, within our community, and between our nations. So that there will never be a time again when the lights go out and we are left in the darkness.

Hymn: All heaven weeps

All heaven weeps
To see the earth
abused and maimed by war and strife;
where people hate
where people fight,
and rob each other of their life.
Kyrie Elieson, Kyrie Elieson
Lord have mercy, God forgive us
For we know not what we do.

When greed prevails
And, crushed by power,
the poor are trampled on for gain,
the heart of God,
is torn in two,
and Christ is crucified again.
Kyrie Elieson, Kyrie Elieson

Lord have mercy, God forgive us
For we know not what we do.

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Act of Remembrance

(From Woodlake Books – Seasons of the Spirit)

Light three candles.

Jesus said: "I give you a new commandment, that you should love one another as I have loved you."

For not being prepared for peace;
for not being prepared for a new way of living;
for not being prepared for the arrival of love's realm:

Blow out candle

Forgive us, our lamps are faint.

For not being ready for God's work on earth;
for not being ready to speak out when love calls;
for not being ready to stand firm in the Gospel:

Blow out candle

Forgive us, our lamps are fading.

For not making plans to destroy armaments;
for not making plans to wipe out injustice;
for not making plans to love our enemy;

Blow out candle

Forgive us, our light is running out.

Absolution

May Almighty God have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
fill your souls with the possibility of heaven
and strengthen you with the oil of righteousness,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Let us remember those whose lives have been sacrificed to build a world of justice and peace.

Silence is kept for two minutes

Light up the world
with the new hope you have been given;
make ready the world for the coming of Christ.

Amen.

All three candles are relit.

Lord's Prayer

Hymn: What shall we pray for those who died

1. What shall we pray for those who died
those on whose death our lives relied?
Silenced by war but not denied,
God give them peace.

2. What shall we pray for those who mourn
friendships and love, their fruit unborn?
Though years have passed, hearts still are torn;
God give them peace.

3. What shall we pray for those who live
tied to the past they can't forgive.
haunted by terrors they relive?
God give them peace.

4. What shall we pray for those who know
nothing of war, and cannot show
grief or regret for friend or foe?

God give them peace.

5. What shall we pray for those who fear
war, in some guise, may reappear
looking attractive and sincere?
God give them peace.

6. God give us peace and, more than this,
show us the path where justice is;
and let us never be remiss
working for peace that lasts.

*Cardwadic Parish Church (Glasgow) and John L.
Bell*

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Blessing

Go forth into the world as pilgrims of God,
upheld by the hands of him who created you.
Go forth to discover new life in Christ,
Son of the Living God, who died for you.
Go in the strength and joy of God's spirit
whose indwelling power will renew you.
Go in the name of the Holy Trinity
to light the lamps of justice and peace
with the oil of righteousness.

And may the Blessing of God, the Father Son and holy Spirit,
be with you this day and all the days to come.