

WATCHUNG AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
GUIDE TO WORSHIP
TWENTY FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

November 15, 2020

10:00 AM

"To whom much is given much will be required. We know that this principle is true even if a person is not religious. That is, a common adage for the whole world is the intuitive awareness that the more gifts/resources/abilities that God has given to you, the more that life/God requires of you."

~ Edward F. Markquart

GODS PEOPLE GATHER

PRELUDE

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Today is not like any other day, and this hour not like any other hour. Each is unique and unrepeatable; we will not be able to visit it again. Therefore, let us delight in this opportunity together, explore its dimensions, and find in its depths the God who is perpetual love mercy and peace. The joy of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!

CALL TO WORSHIP (responsive/responder) Psalm 123 NRSV

Leader: To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!

People: **As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until he has mercy upon us.**

Leader: Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt.

People: **Our soul has had more than its fill of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.**

OPENING PRAYER (one voice/una voz)

Let us pray: Christ Jesus, the joy of loving hearts, be with you all! Whenever you worship God, give it your best! For our praise can never be high enough, our songs never sweet enough, our prayers never loving enough, to be worthy of that spine-tingling, love-beauty which belongs to the God of Christ Jesus. Holy, is the God of Hosts! The whole universe is aflame with the glory of the Lord. Hallelujah! **Amen.**

OPENING HYMN

#305, Come Sing, O Church, in Joy!

THE PREPARATION

CALL TO CONFESSION

When we remember all the mistakes we have made, all the careless words we have spoken, all the contempt we have given to those around us, we have trouble looking God in the eye. But God gazes at us with mercy and love, waiting to forgive us, even as we hesitate to speak of the brokenness of our hearts. Join me as we pray, saying,

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (together/juntos)

Eternal One, we confess that we are short-sighted. We put ourselves before others and are worried we don't have enough, while others around us go without. We call ourselves religious, but fail to be concerned for justice for our neighbors. We fear losing what we have, rather than living into God's ways and trusting in God's love and justice. Forgive us for our fears that hold us back, from our assumptions that cause us to not see the needs around us, and for the times we miss the mark. Call us back into Your ways. In the name of Christ, our Redeemer and Friend, we pray. Amen.

MOMENT OF SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS (responsive/responder)

Leader: This is the good news: God intends for us to find life, to embrace hope, to receive forgiveness through Jesus Christ, our Servant.

People: The end of our journey is not rejection and emptiness, but the fullness of grace and hope in our God. Thanks be to God, we are forgiven. Amen.

GLORIA PATRI

#582, Glory to God, Whose Goodness Shines on Me

THE HEARING / PROCLAMATION

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION (together/juntos)

Gracious God, we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from your mouth. Make us hungry for this heavenly food, that it may nourish us today in the ways of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven. Amen.

NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLE LESSON

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11

Leader: The Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks Be to God.

GOSPEL SCRIPTURE LESSON

Matthew 25: 14-30

Leader: The Gospel of the Lord.

People: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

HOMILY

"Let Us Share With Others"

MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

THE RESPONDING

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (together/juntos)

Let us confess our faith as we say:

We trust in God the Holy Spirit, everywhere the giver and renewer of life. The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor, and binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the church. The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the church. In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace. In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our holy and joyful lives, even as we watch God's new heaven and new earth, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!" With believers in every time and place, we rejoice that nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE / PASTORAL PRAYER

THE LORD'S PRAYER (together/juntos)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

OFFERING MESSAGE

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (together/ juntos)

We can hoard the gifts with which you bless us, God of generosity, or we can share them with others. May what we offer in these moments be the very blessing, the very hope, the very peace others need. This we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

#384, Soon and Very Soon

BENEDICTION (responsive/responder)

Leader: Let us go forth to be God's faithful servants.

People: We will not hide our gifts but share them with everyone we meet.

Leader: Let us go forth to be the followers of Jesus.

People: We will not hold back our compassion, but will offer it to all.

Leader: Let us go forth to be the Spirit's hope and peace.

People: We will be the grace, the joy, the wonder others need in their lives.

TOLLING OF THE BELL

POSTLUDE

There will be a "Coffee Hour" Zoom Chat immediately following worship service at 11am.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ❖ **NO IN PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES:** All worship services will be pre-recorded & streamed online until further notice. For details & to sign in, go to our website home page, www.wapc.net. Also visit our YouTube Channel to see past services.

Please remember, if you are in the buildings at any time, the following health precautions must be used:
 - Mandatory face coverings at all times
 - 6 feet social distancing maintained when at all possible
 - No socializing inside; leave the premises immediately after your event is over
- ❖ **NOTICE:** WAPC will be streaming worship services only on the first, third & fifth Sundays of the month. On the alternate Sundays, WAPC will stream the **Westminster Presbyterian Church of Berkeley Heights'** worship service on our website.
- ❖ **CHUCKLES CORNER-** submissions are needed for the December newsletter. We all could use a giggle or two.
- ❖ **VIRTUAL CROP WALK** was a success!! Thank you actual walkers and online donations.
- ❖ **2021 PLEDGE ENVELOPES-** have arrived and will be mailed out shortly.
- ❖ **PRAYER SHAWL GROUP-** is now meeting in the Parish Hall **every second Saturday of the month at 1pm**. For info. contact Gwyn Gronlund or the church office. *All Are Welcome!*
- ❖ **THURSDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY-** is meeting in the Parish Hall at 7:30pm. *All Are Welcome!*
- ❖ **BACK PACK BENEFIT CONCERT WITH DINNER TO GO** is streaming live **Sat., Dec. 19th at 7pm** on the church's website. See info. on the website; click the HOME tab & drop down to Community Events. **CALL THE OFFICE TO PURCHASE TICKETS AND CHOOSE YOUR MEAL.**
- ❖ **CONGRATULATIONS!!** to Christy & Jim Thomas & the Thomas family, for the birth of their daughter's, one month old twins, Scarlet & Robert Cipolla.
- ❖ **ZOOM CHAT "COFFEE HOUR"** will be held immediately following worship at 11am, **ONLY** on the first, third, & fifth Sundays of the month.
- ❖ **Any time is a good time to use AMAZON SMILE!!** www.smile.amazon.com. Remember, when making purchases on line with Amazon, use this website address & **choose WAPC as your charity**. Amazon will donate .5% of your eligible purchase price to the church. Every little bit helps!
- ❖ **OFFICE HOURS:** Office administrator, Greta Martin-Worthy, will be in the office on Wednesdays, 9am--3pm & Thursdays, 12noon-5pm. During this period, she will also be working from home. If you have a need, please email or call the office & someone will respond as quickly as possible. *Thank you!*

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Lay Reader: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 speaks of the Day of the Lord coming like a thief in the night. The Day of the Lord, as told by the prophets, is the day of judgment, a day of reckoning. While we may have images of the world ending in flames, we see through the prophets a righting of what is wrong, a leveling out of unevenness. The hungry filled with good things and the rich sent away empty. Paul reminds those in the church in Thessalonica to be ready and prepared—to be children of light, in which there is nothing that would be shameful to hide in secret. To live in God’s ways means there will be nothing to be reckoned, for the day will come unexpectedly.

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11 NRSV

⁵Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³When they say, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.

⁶So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him.

¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Leader: The Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks Be to God

Matthew 25:14-30 contains Jesus' Parable of the Talents. Matthew asks how do we use our resources and gifts—do we share them with others, using what God has given us to share the Good News of God's Love—or do we believe there is only enough for ourselves, so we don't share it? Do we believe in God's abundance or the myth of scarcity. Should we have great sympathy for the one who buried their talent, or be afraid of a harsh master?

Matthew 25: 14-30 NRSV

¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents.

¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’

²¹His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²²And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’

²³His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed;

²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ ²⁶But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest.

Leader: The Gospel of the Lord.

People: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

LET US SHARE WITH OTHERS- MATTHEW 25:14-30 NRSV

Let us pray: Let the sword of the spirit, the Word of God, live abundantly in your mouth and in your hearts; and whatever you must do, do it in the name of the Lord. Amen.

My message today is simply let us share with others. It is not complicated but it can be difficult for some. Now don't misunderstand me about sharing, I know that there are times that we really want to give much more than we can comfortably afford, but the effort to do what you can I think is admirable. Remember, it is not how much you give, but the fact that you want to give which makes it so special.

Recently, one of the Elders, who leads our stewardship campaign was asked by a parishioner if he was going to send letters to the congregation about pledging for the upcoming year. I wondered myself if we should order their envelopes like usual.

I worried that during this pandemic if we would be insensitive for asking for pledges with so many people losing their jobs. I labored on the proper response to that question. Let me answer with the story about the widow.

Some of you may remember the biblical story about the lesson of the widow's mite or the widow's offering. Mark 12:41-44 says, *"Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums.*

A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents. Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them, 'Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood.'"

The widow who is really in need and left alone puts her hope in God and continued night and day to pray and to ask God for help. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

Did you get that part about suffering for a little while. I do not know about you, but I do not want to suffer at all, but I know that is totally unrealistic. So, I refer to the widow who put all her trust and faith in God with just a pittance of her contribution and Jesus Christ admired the widow for her meager giving. Wow, how special is that.

Today's Gospel reading featured the parable of the talents. The kingdom of heaven is like *a man going abroad, who called his servants and trusted all his capital into their hands. To one he gave five talents, to another two talents, and to one he gave one talent. To each according to his ability.*

Through many generations preaching and teaching has focused on how well Christians used the gifts God has given them. There has been particular emphasis on our need for good stewardship. The amounts of money, 5 talents, 2 talents or 1 talent, were likened to our special abilities. So, the meaning of the word talent changed; no longer does it mean a unit of money but is solely blessed on the special gifts a person has been given by God.

So, what was the value of a talent? That depends on whether it was in silver or gold. It seems that for the Greeks a talent weighed about 25 kilograms or 50 pounds of silver or gold. For the Jews it was about 50 kilograms or 110 pounds of either silver or gold.

In other words, it stood for a large sum of money. So do not let anyone feel sorry for the servant who was given only one talent. Yes, the others got more to manage. Even though one received 5 talents and the second was trusted with 2 talents.

Yet even one talent was considered a large amount of money. In silver it would be substantial—the equivalent of 15 years wages for a laborer. In gold it would be a small fortune. What the master did, before he went away, was to entrust them to trade with these large sums, and to try and make a handsome profit.

Wine, oil, grain, textiles, pottery, land, shipping, or whatever. He took the big risk and allowed them to make their own decisions. He expected them to take a similar risk. They were to put what was entrusted to them to good use. Commerce, like human life itself, can be a risky business. There is always the possibility of setbacks and loss.

Trading is high risk. But the master knows all about that; he understands. He wants them to try; to give their best. That is what counts. GOD REALLY TRUSTS US. Please note that there is one key element you need to recognize in this parable and that is the Lord truly places the responsibility in the hands of his servants.

The Lord of the Gospel fully trusts his servants. He leaves his world in our hands. It is now entirely up to us whether we succeed or fail. A high-risk strategy indeed!

This is not make-believe stuff. He was serious. He does not even stay in the background, like a back-seat driver, giving complimentary advice or mild reproof. Nor is he like a driving instructor with calm nerves yet with a separate brake pedal for him to employ in an emergency.

The first two servants honor the trust placed in them. They take some risk and put the money to use. Their talents became highly productive in the commerce of this life. The person with five talents made a profit of another 5 talents. The one with two talents, gained a profit of two more. Not bad at all, a 100% return over the long period the Master is absent overseas.

These two receive the Master's gratitude. *Well done, good and trustworthy servant. You have proved yourself in a small way, now I will entrust you with something big. Come here and enjoy your master's delight.* Those who are faithful receive a two-pronged reward.

First, immediately there is the sheer joy of celebrating in the Master's presence. *"Come and enjoy your master's delight.*

Second, then comes more trust and responsibility. Those who do well for Christ Jesus are not given a "golden handshake" and allowed to sit on their pride. Instead, they are given larger tasks. *I will entrust you with something big.* That is a sobering thought.

In the many generations since Jesus told this parable, among Christians there has always been a tension between those who want to feel safe and those who are prepared to take a risk in the name of their Master. We can either choose to hoard or share the Gospel with the world.

Where do we stand? Playing it safe or taking the risk? For my part, I will always take the calculated risk for Christ's sake. Better that than becoming constricted like that one talent servant who went and buried his master's treasure. He is the big disaster.

The temptation for believers to "play it safe" may be one the smartest items in the devil's box of tricks. Of course, we need to minimize the risks, to be wary. In fact, all believers are called by Jesus to be *"harmless and doves yet as wise as serpents."* We have no commission from the Lord to be foolhardy in the way we use our lives and our gifts, or in the way we employ the treasure of the Gospel.

No room for fear. Risk it, for God's sake! Do not be afraid. I guess none of us can look back over the years of our Christian experience and be completely content with how much we have given. Maybe we could have given more and maybe we have regrets.

But fear of giving is not appropriate. It was the over-cautious servant who was the one to be afraid. *"Master, I knew you to be a hard man. You reap where you have not sown. You gather where you have not scattered. So, I was afraid, and I went and hid your gold in the ground."* Yes indeed, one of the three servants claimed to have been ruled by fear. And look where it got him!

Our stewardship of what God has given us, those calculated risks, should never be exercised under the shadow of fear. Ours is a God of perfect love, who is always on our side. Perfect love. No room for fear, please. Because at it says in the first letter of the Gospel of John: *"Perfect love casts out fear."* Amen.

Let us pray: Loving God, giver of every useful and beautiful gift, you have made us shareholders in the Spirit and investors in the Gospel of Christ. Encourage us to so speak and act and pray, that all we hold in trust may be used more wisely than our own wisdom could direct, and more lovingly than the small resources of our compassion would allow. Through Christ Jesus, your true Child and our Lord. Amen!

Pastoral Prayer – Prayers of the People – Intercessions

Lord God, we give you thanks for all your gifts to us—for daily food, for health, for each breath we take, for freedom to choose, and for the gifts of your word, your power and your love.

Our hearts are truly overwhelmed, O God, when we consider how you have entrusted so much to us. May we be worthy of that trust—may we be a people who are unafraid to live as fully and as richly as you want us to live.

Help us, O God, as followers of Jesus, to multiply all that you have given us, to risk spreading your word and perhaps see it misunderstood, to gamble by loving those whom others think worthy only of hate, to take chances by doing good to those who have not done good to us.

Help us be faith filled and the desire to increase your glory and your goodness in this world. Make us people who share in both word and deed that which you have given to us.

We pray for everyone who gather virtually today, both here and around the world, that it may encourage all of its members to discover, develop and use all their gifts, those of nature and those of grace.

Dear Lord, we honor our **veterans**, worthy men and women who gave their best when they were called upon to serve and protect their country. We pray that you will bless them, Lord, for their unselfish service in the continual struggle to preserve our freedoms, our safety, and our country's heritage, for all of us.

We pray for those who are poor in body or in spirit, for those oppressed and heavy laden, for those sick or in despair.

We pray wherever folk sit with the dying, making funeral arrangements, or spending sleepless nights grieving and fearing; may your saving love abound. *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*

Holy Friend, you cherish every single soul on this planet. Please teach us, slow learners how to better live together, organize communities, end injustice, and eradicate all those evils that defile the sacred, divine image that resides in us all.

Lord, hear our prayers that we may love you with our whole being and willingly share the concerns of our neighbors. Minister your Spirit to all those for whom we have prayed, and help us walk faithfully in the path of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

PRAYER LIST

Healing, comforting, and/or supportive prayers for:

- *Marla Miksa*, recovering from surgery.
- *Jim Thomas' brother, Bart Thomas*, who is slowly but continuing to recuperate from a successful brain procedure.
- *Marilyn Cortright*, recovering at home and continued prayers for her husband, *Tim Cortright*.
- *Amanda Lake* for health concerns.
- *Susan Sendelsky & her sister, Kerry*, members of Pastor Lindsey's former church family, Oak Tree Presbyterian, both fighting cancer.
- *Jane Windbush, Pastor's sister & Stephanie Weaver, Pastor's niece*, who both suffer from Rheumatoid Arthritis.
- *Jackie Slattery & Sean Slattery, daughter & grandson of Estelle Kennedy* during a difficult time.
- *Gail Schmeisser*, continuing to be challenged with mobility issues.

Continued prayers for those people at home or in continued care:

- *Grace Landsperger, Margaret Herman-Angely, and Estelle and Betsi Kennedy* at home.
- *Gail McKenna*, at 2225 Kirkland Village Circle, Bethlehem, PA 18017.

Prayers of support and thanksgiving for:

- *Jim Roselli*
- *Pastor Madelynne Lindsey*
- *Gwyn Gronlund*