



November 15, 2020  
24th Sunday after Pentecost  
Service of the Word

*Our readings during November speak of the end times. Zephaniah proclaims that the coming day of the LORD will be filled with wrath and distress. Paul says it will come like a thief in the night and urges us to be awake and sober. Jesus tells the parable of the talents, calling us to use our gifts, while we still have time, for the greater and common good. In a world filled with violence and despair, we gather around signs of hope—*

*word, water, bread, and wine—eager to welcome the good news of Christ's coming among us.*

**WELCOME!** We are glad to have you join us in worship today. Here are a few notes to help you feel more at home participating in our worship.

**Worshiping.** Today's service is printed in this bulletin. Parts in bold indicate responses by everyone in which you are invited to participate.

**Adjustments to our service.** In order to comply with safety and social distancing guidelines, it will be mandatory that everyone have a face covering and everyone must be mindful of keeping their distance from others. Please refrain from mingling in confined spaces before and/or after service.

Other adjustments are:

- Congregational singing is discouraged. If you feel you must, please sing softly with your mask in place.
- The sign of the PEACE will be offered by a wave or bow while staying in place.
- The OFFERING PLATE will not be passed or brought forward. It will be in the back of the sanctuary instead.
- If this is a service of HOLY COMMUNION, communion elements will be available as you exit the sanctuary.
- At the conclusion of the service, everyone is asked to remain in their pew. Ushers will dismiss people by row to maintain safe spacing.
- The Sanctuary, Narthex and Broadway lobby are the only areas open. All other areas of St. Stephen's are closed.

**Prayer Requests.** Please call the office if you'd like to place someone on our prayer list.

**PRELUDE:** O God, Our Help in Ages Past

**+ GATHERING +**  
*The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.*

**CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

*All may make the sign of the cross, the sign that is marked at baptism, as the presiding deacon begins.*

D Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,  
in whose image we are made,  
who claims us and calls us beloved.

**C Amen.**

D Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

*Silence is kept for reflection.*

D Holy One,

**C we confess that we are not awake for you.**

**We are not faithful in using your gifts.**

**We forget the least of our siblings.**

**We do not see your beautiful image in one another.**

**We are infected by sin that divides your beloved community.**

**Open our hearts to your coming,**

**open our eyes to see you in our neighbor,**

**open our hands to serve your creation. Amen.**

D Beloved, we are God's children,  
and Jesus, our Beloved, opens the door to us.

Through Jesus we are forgiven,

by Jesus we are welcome,

in Jesus we are called to rejoice!

Let us live in the promises prepared for us  
from the foundation of the world.

**C Amen.**

**GATHERING SONG: *Lord of Light* (ELW 688)**

*All are invited to listen.*

*Lord of light, your name outshining  
all the stars and suns of space,  
use our talents in your kingdom  
as the servants of your grace;  
use us to fulfill your purpose  
in the gift of Christ your Son:*

*Refrain*

*Father, as in highest heaven,  
so on earth your will be done.*

**GREETING**

D The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**C And also with you.**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

D The time for harvest is close at hand.

What have you done with the gifts God has given you?

**C We have brought our gifts to the house of the Lord.**

D Praise God for the gifts and for opportunities for service that they represent.

Generous God, accept our gifts and our lives this day.

**C Loving God, accept our praise and gratitude. AMEN.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

D Let us pray. Righteous God, our merciful master, you own the earth and all its peoples,  
and you give us all that we have. Inspire us to serve you with justice and wisdom, and  
prepare us for the joy of the day of your coming, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and  
Lord.

**C Amen.**

+ **WORD** +  
*God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.*

**FIRST READING: Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18**

*Zephaniah (like the prophet Amos in last week's first reading) presents the day of the LORD as one of judgment and wrath. Descriptions of the last day in the New Testament include details taken from Old Testament accounts of the day of the LORD.*

A reading from Zephaniah.

<sup>7</sup>Be silent before the Lord GOD!  
For the day of the LORD is at hand;  
the LORD has prepared a sacrifice,  
he has consecrated his guests.  
<sup>12</sup>At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,  
and I will punish the people  
who rest complacently on their dregs,  
those who say in their hearts,  
“The LORD will not do good,  
nor will he do harm.”  
<sup>13</sup>Their wealth shall be plundered,  
and their houses laid waste.  
Though they build houses,  
they shall not inhabit them;  
though they plant vineyards,  
they shall not drink wine from them.  
<sup>14</sup>The great day of the LORD is near,  
near and hastening fast;  
the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter,  
the warrior cries aloud there.  
<sup>15</sup>That day will be a day of wrath,  
a day of distress and anguish,  
a day of ruin and devastation,  
a day of darkness and gloom,  
a day of clouds and thick darkness,  
<sup>16</sup>a day of trumpet blast and battle cry  
against the fortified cities  
and against the lofty battlements.  
<sup>17</sup>I will bring such distress upon people  
that they shall walk like the blind;  
because they have sinned against the LORD,

their blood shall be poured out like dust,  
and their flesh like dung.

<sup>18</sup>Neither their silver nor their gold  
will be able to save them  
on the day of the LORD's wrath;  
in the fire of his passion  
the whole earth shall be consumed;  
for a full, a terrible end  
he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

...The word of the Lord. **C Thanks be to God.**

**PSALM: PSALM 90:1-8 [9-11] 12**

*The psalm for the day is read responsively. The lector will read the plain text and all are invited to read the text in **bold**.*

<sup>1</sup>Lord, you have | been our refuge  
from one generation | to another.

<sup>2</sup>**Before the mountains were brought forth, or the land and the | earth were born,  
from age to age | you are God.**

<sup>3</sup>You turn us back to the | dust and say,  
"Turn back, O child- | ren of earth."

<sup>4</sup>**For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when | it is past  
and like a watch | in the night;**

<sup>5</sup>you sweep them away | like a dream,  
they fade away suddenly | like the grass:

<sup>6</sup>**in the morning it is | green and flourishes;  
in the evening it is dried | up and withered.**

<sup>7</sup>For we are consumed | by your anger;  
we are afraid because | of your wrath.

<sup>8</sup>**Our iniquities you have | set before you,  
and our secret sins in the light | of your countenance.**

<sup>9</sup>When you are angry, all our | days are gone;  
we bring our years to an end | like a sigh.

<sup>10</sup>**The span of our life is seventy years, perhaps in strength | even eighty;  
yet the sum of them is but labor and sorrow, for they pass away quickly and |  
we are gone.**

<sup>11</sup>Who regards the power | of your wrath?  
Who rightly fears your | indignation?

<sup>12</sup>**So teach us to num- | ber our days  
that we may apply our | hearts to wisdom.**

## **SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11**

*Though we do not know and cannot calculate the day of Christ's return, we live faithfully in the here and now as we anticipate the day when we will be given eternal salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

A reading from 1 Thessalonians.

<sup>1</sup>Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup>For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup>When 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! <sup>4</sup>But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; <sup>5</sup>for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. <sup>6</sup>So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; <sup>7</sup>for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup>But 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. <sup>9</sup>For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup>who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. <sup>11</sup>Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

...The word of the Lord. **C Thanks be to God.**

## **GOSPEL: Matthew 25:14-30**

*Jesus tells a parable about his second coming, indicating that it is not sufficient merely to maintain things as they are. Those who await his return should make good use of the gifts that God has provided them.*

D The holy gospel according to Matthew.

**C Glory to you, O Lord.**

[Jesus said to the disciples:] <sup>14</sup>"For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup>to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup>The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup>In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. <sup>18</sup>But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>19</sup>After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup>Then 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.' <sup>21</sup>His 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.’ <sup>22</sup>And 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.’ <sup>23</sup>His 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.’ <sup>24</sup>Then 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; <sup>25</sup>so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ <sup>26</sup>But 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?’ <sup>27</sup>Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup>So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. <sup>29</sup>For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. <sup>30</sup>As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

...The gospel of the Lord. **C Praise to you, O Christ.**

## SERMON

### **HYMN OF THE DAY: *I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light* (ELW 815)**

*All are invited to stand and listen as the Word of God is proclaimed in song.*

*I want to walk as a child of the light.*

*I want to follow Jesus.*

*God set the stars to give light to the world.*

*The star of my life is Jesus.*

#### *Refrain*

*In him there is no darkness at all.*

*The night and the day are both alike.*

*The Lamb is the light of the city of God.*

*Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.*

## **APOSTLES' CREED**

**A** With the whole Church, we confess our faith.

**C** **I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;**

**he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

### **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

A Longing for Christ's reign to come among us, we pray for the outpouring of God's power on the church, the world, and all in need.

*A brief silence.*

A Lord of the church, ignite your people with the passion of your love. By the fire of your Holy Spirit, unify us across ministries, congregations, and denominations and refine us to participate in your activity throughout the world. Hear us, O God.

**C Your mercy is great.**

A Lord of creation, we stand in awe at the works of your hands and praise you for the beauty of nature. Bless the earth for your glory and restore its integrity where exploitation has caused ruin. Hear us, O God.

**C Your mercy is great.**

A Lord of the nations, sound forth your justice in the ears of all leaders. Increase concern for those who are most vulnerable, especially as international leaders forge trade agreements and cooperate to end human rights abuses. Hear us, O God.

**C Your mercy is great.**

A Lord of all in need, search out all who cry to you in distress. Scatter the heavy clouds of depression, chronic illness, unemployment, and loneliness with your radiant light. Send us as encouragement and signs of your healing. We pray for Perry and all those we now name aloud or in the silence of our hearts...*brief silence*...Hear us, O God.

**C Your mercy is great.**



A Lord of the stranger, stir up holy restlessness in us to extend love to those at the margins. Release our desire for control and open us to learn from the perspectives of others. Hear us, O God.

**C Your mercy is great.**

A Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, until that day when you gather all creation around your throne where you will reign forever and ever.

**C Amen.**

## **PEACE**

*The presiding deacon and the assembly greet each other in the peace of the risen Christ.*

D The peace of Christ be with you always.

**C And also with you.**

*The people may greet one another with a sign of Christ's peace with a wave or bow while staying in place.*

## **MUSICAL INTERLUDE: *Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil***

### **THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD**

D Let us pray. Praise and thanks to you, holy God, for by your Word you made all things: you spoke light into darkness, called forth beauty from chaos, and brought life into being. For your Word of life, O God,

**C we give you thanks and praise.**

D By your Word you called your people Israel to tell of your wonderful gifts: freedom from captivity, water on the desert journey, a pathway home from exile, wisdom for life with you. For your Word of life, O God,

**C we give you thanks and praise.**

D Through Jesus, your Word made flesh, you speak to us and call us to witness: forgiveness through the cross, life to those entombed by death, the way of your self-giving love. For your Word of life, O God,

**C we give you thanks and praise.**

D Send your Spirit of truth, O God; rekindle your gifts within us: renew our faith, increase our hope, and deepen our love, for the sake of a world in need. Faithful to your Word, O God, draw near to all who call on you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever.

**C Amen.**

## **LORD'S PRAYER**

D Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**C 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 trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass 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 and ever. Amen.**

**+ SENDING +**

*God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.*

## **BLESSING**

D May the God of all creation,  
in whose image we are made,  
who claims us and calls us beloved,  
who strengthens us for service,  
give us reason to rejoice and be glad!

The blessing of God,  
Sovereign, Savior, and Spirit,  
be with us today and always.

**C Amen.**

**SENDING SONG:** *Through the Night of Doubt and Sorrow* (ELW 327)  
*All are invited to listen.*

*Through the night of doubt and sorrow,  
onward goes the pilgrim band,  
singing songs of expectation,  
marching to the promised land.  
Clear before us through the darkness  
gleams and burns the guiding light;*

*pilgrim clasps the hand of pilgrim  
stepping fearless through the night.*

## **DISMISSAL**

A Beloved of God,  
go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**C Thanks be to God.**

**POSTLUDE:** Battle Hymn of the Republic

## **A Significant Trust**

On one level we can read the parable of the talents and see a simple lesson: A property owner entrusts property to his workers and goes away. The workers respond in different ways to this trust, and he responds to them in different ways upon his return. The third is paralyzed by fear. We ought not fear putting the gifts God has given us to work for good in our world.

There is another depth to this story found in the property entrusted to the workers: One is given five talents, the second two talents, and the third only one talent. We are told this is according to their ability. How much was a talent? In our culture, where we have coins and bills for our currency, this last worker seems to be entrusted with pocket change. A talent, however, was not a denomination of currency in the way we might understand. A talent was more than fifteen years' wages for a laborer. Fifteen years!

For illustration purposes, let us assume a laborer today makes \$10 an hour. If a person works forty hours per week with two weeks of vacation, a year's wages would be \$20,000. Fifteen years of wages would be \$300,000. This would be one talent. Two talents would be \$600,000; five would be \$1,500,000.

Why all this math? What we see in the value of the talents are significant amounts of property entrusted to the workers—even the one with the least ability. What is beautiful in this story is the trust the property owner has in his workers. His disappointment with the third shows the trust to be sincere. What if this one had trusted himself as much as the property owner did?

Psalm 139 tells us we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Perhaps this parable is an invitation for us to believe in ourselves as much as God believes in us, and thus experience the joy our loving Creator already has for us.

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