

Worship at home

Current sermon series: Stewards of Souls
November 1, 2020

Call to Worship:

Prayers of praise, confession, and supplication:

(prayers for All Saints Sunday adapted from <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>)

Creator, Christ, and Spirit:
God of life and blessing, you created all that exists.
In Christ, you offer your redeeming love to every soul in every situation.
So, it is our greatest joy to be united by your Spirit
in the community of your people,
stretching throughout the generations, all around the world you love.
We join our thanks and praise to the voices of all your saints,
both in heaven and on earth,
who worship and adore you, saying:

All blessing and glory;
all wisdom and thanksgiving;
all honour and power belong to you, O God,
this day and forever and ever!

It is not because we are afraid of you, O God, but because we love you and trust in
your loving kindness, that we confess our sins:

God of courage and commitment,
We confess that we have not followed the path you set before us.
Discomfort and fear hold us back from fully embracing your gift of new
life.
Our anxieties prevent us from bearing witness to your love.
Our short-sightedness creates in us fear that detracts from your gift of
patience.

Forgive us, O God.
Give us courage that we may be your saints in our own time,
faithfully following Jesus, no matter the cost.

Assurance of pardon:

Hear and believe the good news of the gospel! Anyone who is in Christ is made a
new creation. The old life is fading away and the new one is coming to be. Know
that you are forgiven and forgive one another in Christ Jesus.

Hymn #510 “Deep in the shadows of the past”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNvgG1zRxSM> (different tune than hymnbook)

The Word of God read and interpreted:

Stewards of Souls: Patience

This sermon is the third in our apprenticeship as spiritual orchardists. In this series we're learning to promote healthy root beliefs by which the Holy Spirit can nourish within us the qualities that make for mature disciples of Jesus; or, to use the apostle Paul's metaphor, that make for healthy fruits of the Spirit.

We began with the principle root belief that God is *love*. We explored the significance of this love: that there exists a living God who chooses to reach across the human-divine divide in order to work for the healing and wholeness of our well-being; body, mind, and spirit. We also looked at the actions of discipleship of Sabbath-keeping and private worship by which we can rest in and thus encourage this core belief.

We then explored the belief that Jesus of Nazareth is the one through whom this Living God chooses to reach across the divide. Jesus is the incarnation of the God who is love (the Son of God) and that in him is an experience of life that exceeds the constraints and the struggles of our present moments (eternal life). We looked at learning to hear God's word and then to obey it are acts of discipleship that help us trust the love of God and, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we find our *faith* expanding around our momentary struggles.

Thus far in our apprenticeship, we've looked at the qualities of love and faith and some of the related root beliefs and acts of discipleship.

The quality of the fruit of the Spirit we'll consider today is *patience*.

Let us listen and hear the word of God:

READ LUKE 8:4-8, 11-15.

Unhealthy root beliefs:

When we read the Bible with the desire to hear God's Word to us that we might obey, a useful approach is to reflect on which situation or character is the one with which we most identify today. And it is often the case the you can identify with multiple scenarios simultaneously, or at different points throughout your daily journeys!

In this parable, Jesus presented four situations:

the hard-packed path on which the seed is not able to germinate;
the stony ground on which the seed germinates but quickly withers;
the thorny ground on which the seed germinates and grows to a point,
but never flourishes;
and the well-cultivated, well-watered, and well-fertilized soil.

With which do you most identify? Is there one in particular? Perhaps you identify with multiple?

Arguably, for most of us, the most truthful answer would be multiple!

In each of these scenarios are embedded beliefs which create the situation described. The first three describe unhealthy growth resulting from unhealthy root beliefs. It is with these that I want to begin.

In the first scenario, the embedded beliefs might be that either the gospel is not true or that it is not good news. Perhaps because of the influence of your chosen teachers and/or family; perhaps because something has happened between you and the church community that causes you a great deal of skepticism about the claims Christians make; perhaps you have suffered a tragedy and you have not been able to reconcile your experiences with a loving and powerful God. Whatever the cause, the embedded belief is that if there is a living God, he's not a loving god; at the very least, he's not a god on whom one can depend. The Hebrew poets described the result of this belief as having a hardened heart. There is a shield around your soul and the seed fails to penetrate.

In the second scenario, you receive the gospel enthusiastically and you believe with all your heart that it holds the magic answer to all of life's problems. That now, because you know Jesus, life will be filled with light and ease. When experience differs from the vision, however, the tension becomes too great to bear. While you believe that God is good and loving and trustworthy as far as his power allows, you begin to believe that God is not actually able to reach across the divide and intervene in human affairs in any real, beneficial way.

In the third scenario, the embedded beliefs are that God is love, and that God is able to reach across the divide; however, when compared with the very tangible threats and pleasures of comfortably affluent living, God becomes more a concept than a reality.

He's a nice idea that we can talk about once a week when we get together for juice and wafers.

These unhealthy beliefs which become embedded deep within us (and, I would argue, exist in varying degrees within most of us and become more or less influential depending on our circumstances) profoundly detract from the Spirit's work of developing within us the qualities of a healthy disciple of Jesus.

And, particularly, they detract from the Spirit's work of developing within us the quality of *patience*.

The quality:

Here's why I say that:

Patience is the capacity to endure hardship and inconvenience without complaint and with calmness, hope, and a willingness to wait.

I love the Hebrew understanding: "orekh 'appayim." It means "length of nose." The idea is that someone with a long nose is a person who is not wound so tightly, who is not so focused in their vision, who is not so angry as to get 'right up in your face' when things aren't going as planned. Because of their long nose they're able to maintain a distance that is adequate to help them remain calm, gain perspective, and rest in the healthy assurances of faith.

In contrast, the soul who allows itself to be led by the unhealthy beliefs, develops a short nose. We might call it a short fuse! Your frame of reference narrows to the point you can't see the big picture. All you know is the heat, or the thorn; the disappointment or the frustration that is right in front of you.

Healthy root beliefs:

The soul that is the good soil has the assurance that, in spite of the heat of the sun, or the cares of the world, or the jeers and discouragements of the skeptics and naysayers; the seed has been planted, it will germinate, the harvest will happen, and it will be enough.

The seed is the word of God:

There is a living God whose crowning characteristic is steadfast love. Jesus is the incarnation of this God. By his crucifixion and our obedience to his word there is an

experience of life that exceeds the temporal constraints and struggles of the present moment. The resurrection is the seal that, despite the momentary struggles and frustrations, *it will be done, and it will be enough.*

The actions of discipleship:

The quality is patience. Healthy root beliefs are that by the grace of Jesus the Son of the Living God of love and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, “it” will be done, and “it” will be enough.

I want to suggest some actions of discipleship from my own observations that can help us nourish these root beliefs.

1. Disciples of Jesus love the Lord with all our heart, by caring for the emotional landscapes entrusted to us; with all our mind, by caring for the creative, intellectual, and logical landscapes entrusted to us.

Part of loving the Lord our God with all our heart and mind has to do with *embracing our limits.*

The prayer of Psalm 131 begins:

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,
 my eyes are not raised too high;
 I do not occupy myself with things
 too great and too marvelous for me.
 But I have calmed and quieted my soul....

And Psalm 46 concludes: “Be still, and know that I am God!”

I suggest that nourishing the root belief that whatever “it” is, it will be enough goes a long way towards developing the quality of patience. We are the creatures, not the Creator; there are limits to what we can achieve in a day. Similarly, there are limits to what our children, spouses, parents, neighbours, and politicians can achieve in a day. Therefore, there are limits to what we can compassionately expect of others.

The God who is Trinity is looking after the redemption of the cosmos. When Jesus returns and heaven and earth are forever wed, we will shout “Amen!”, “It is finished!”

On the more immediate level, when we act in love – in *agape* – born from resting in the assurance that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is love and that we are loved, it will be enough.

So, the first action of discipleship involves the emotional and cognitive task of embracing our limits and embracing the limits of others.

2. Disciples of Jesus love the Lord by also caring for the bodily landscapes entrusted to us.

When our bodies are functioning as God intends them, it is far easier for us to develop long noses and gain perspective. However, when we're tired; running on carbs and caffeine; when we're restless with too little clean oxygen in our blood, it becomes easiest (and almost impossible not to) to fixate on the immediate trial or inconvenience. Our noses become very short. The heat, the thorns, the trampling feet become all we can think about. We begin to panic and we react in fear and hostility.

Just as our spiritual health is intertwined with our emotional and psychological health, so it is intertwined with our physical health. God entrusted to us souls: spirits, minds, and bodies. And God calls us to steward the entirety of the soul and worship him with the entirety of the soul.

So, disciples of Jesus prepare the soil by choosing to believe, listen to, and obey the Word of God as we saw last week. And, through Sabbath-keeping and private worship, we rest in the assurance that God is love. And disciples of Jesus care for the soil in which grow the roots by accepting our limits. Apart from Christ we are not immortal, and we can only function emotionally, intellectually, and physically in the degree that our bodies are healthy. So, disciples of Jesus care for the soil by eating well, sleeping as well as possible, exercising as much and in whatever way we can, spending as much time as possible outside, washing our hands, and brushing our teeth.

To God alone be the glory, honour, and might now and forever.

Amen.

Hymn: #574 "With the Lord as my guide"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMr-F_SBnw

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession:¹

God of all people, all places and all situations,
we come seeking your strength, your peace, and your direction,
to know the comfort of your presence and the energy of your Spirit.
You have called us to work towards reconciliation in the world.
Help us to live out the ways of your kingdom in your church and in our lives.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Jesus, you said, “Blessed are the poor.” We pray for those who find themselves on the margins of the economy, suffering the anxiety and restriction of low income and the insecurity it brings. Challenge us in our stewardship so that this world will more and more reflect your kingdom, where there is enough for all, and everyone can enjoy the blessings of your creation.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Jesus, you said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst.” We pray for people and communities facing famine and drought, as well as the pandemic.
Give strength to people and agencies dedicated to alleviating misery. Move us to share what we have with those who have so much less.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Christ, you blessed the peacemakers. We pray for those who work for peace and reconciliation in a divided world. Protect those who face violence, persecution and chaos in their homes, workplaces or communities. Transform the day-to-day struggles of those living in danger or discord. Move us to serve as mediators and models of forgiveness in our relationships.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Jesus, you blessed those who weep. We pray for those around the world and in our community who weep.
We name in silence those on our hearts this day, including those saints who have blessed us in days and years gone by:
(A time of silence is kept.)

Keep us united in love with all who rest from life in this world but live with you.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Blessing:

The Lord bless you and keep you,

¹ from <https://presbyterian.ca/worship> worship resource for November 1, 2020

the Lord be kind and gracious to you,
the Lord turn his face upon you,
and grant you peace.
Amen.