

Worship at Home
Sermon series: Stewards of Souls
October 25, 2020

Call to Worship:

Come and see what God has done:
 he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.
He turned the sea into dry land;
 they passed through the river on foot.
Bless our God, O peoples,
 let the sound of his praise be heard,
who has kept us among the living,
 and has not let our feet slip.
God has brought us out to a spacious place.
Blessed be God.¹

Let us worship.
Let us pray.

Prayers of praise, confession, and supplication:

We praise you, O God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
By your love you choose to work for the salvation of your good creation.
By your love you chose to send your Son Jesus, the Messiah, our Lord.
In him you give life eternal;
 life that exceeds the constraints and struggles of our present moments.
In him you give the hope of resurrection,
 that darkness is not nor will be victorious.
In him you give faith,
 and by faith we have hope.

And yet,
far too often despair comes upon us,
 and the cares of the world weigh us down.
Far too often we become mired in the mundane,
 and lose the gift of reverence.
Far too often we take your good gifts for granted,
 and lose the joy that is the consequence of gratitude.
Far too often we ignore your promise of forgiveness,
 and allow sin to control our thoughts and behaviours.

“Lord, my soul clings to the dust;
 revive me according to your word.
My soul melts away for sorrow;
 strengthen me according to your word.

¹ Psalm 67

Put false ways far from me;
and graciously teach me your law/
I have chosen the way of faithfulness;
I run the way of your commandments,
for you enlarge my understanding.
Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes”²
for the sake of your kingdom,
and in the name of our Lord Jesus, the Christ.
Amen.

Assurance of pardon:

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.
And whatever is born of God conquers the world.

Hear and believe the good news: by his death on the cross, by his resurrection,
and in the promise of his return, Jesus has forgiven sin and offers eternal life to
anyone who will receive his grace in faith.

In Jesus, we are forgiven and set free to live.
Accept God’s pardon. And enjoy His peace.
Give thanks to the Lord for He is good,
his love endures forever.

Hymn #569 “O Jesus, I have promised”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rC-2Ss9tg7I>

The Word of God read and interpreted:

² Psalm 119:25ff.

Stewards of Souls: Faith

In this series of sermons, we're reflecting on the parable of the talents (Matthew 25). In the parable, each servant was entrusted with different parts of the master's estate. All were given at least one talent, one piece of wealth. Everyone was entrusted with the care of a person. A soul. A body, a mind, and an emotional and spiritual landscape.

The metaphor we're using is from Galatians 5 in which Paul described a healthy Spirit-led person in terms of fruit. The fruit is the individual disciple of Jesus; the individual soul. Just as fruit grow on trees, so disciples of Jesus grow within communities of faith, known as the church. There are many expressions of the church. Some have as their focal point a physical building in which the disciples congregate. But, as we're being challenged to accept in this age of pandemic, that's not necessarily an essential component. Whatever the community is, it provides structure for the ripening of the fruit. It provides the trunk in which are the cells and the veins that conduct the nutrients from the roots to the fruit. There are also qualities which, when they develop and work together, create a mature and healthy disciple. The qualities (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) are gifts of the Holy Spirit which we receive as we care for good root beliefs and weed out the toxic beliefs.

And so, we're looking at the root beliefs and the actions of discipleship which nourish those beliefs and which, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, develop in us the 9 qualities of a mature, Spirit-led disciple of Jesus.

Last week we began by looking at the quality of love, the root beliefs that collect the nutrients for that quality, and some actions of discipleship which promote the health of these roots (Sabbath keeping and private worship in which we can learn to rest and delight in the assurances of the God who is love).

Today we'll look at faith.

READ 1ST JOHN 5:1-13.

Remember, in this series we're looking at 9 qualities of a healthy, Spirit-led life. Because those qualities are gifts from the Spirit, it's not helpful to obsess over how we can achieve them in ourselves. We can only receive them when the Spirit gives them. So, instead of focusing too long on the qualities themselves, we're looking at the root beliefs that, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, grow within us those qualities. And we're

looking at actions of discipleship which we take in order to promote the health of those good root beliefs.

a) The Quality: Faith.

Faith is a Spirit-birthed consequence of our discipleship; of our willingness to take responsibility for the body, mind, and spirit which the Master has entrusted to our care. In his letter to some congregations that were facing schism within themselves, John encouraged the disciples to place their confidence in the gospel of the love of God and the hope of what the scriptures often call eternal life. In so doing, he argued that by faith we can we can endure the struggles, disappointments, and wounds of this life while maintaining love, and hope, and gratitude and warding off fear and despair. *Faith is a gift* of the Holy Spirit which, as John wrote, is *the victory that conquers the world*.

Faith involves *trust and obedience and belief*.

b) The Root Beliefs:

Over the years, from early childhood on, we accumulate beliefs that become embedded deep within us and which provide us with our values and our understandings of how the world ought to function. These beliefs come from many sources: culture, family, teachers, preachers, the books we read, and the media we consume. They direct how we respond to various situations in life. What we believe and what we value influences how we think and consequently how we behave.

For example. You might work incessantly to maintain a spotless house. And there are good reasons for keeping a clean house. As you think through why this is so important to you, you might begin to realize that at some point in your life, you've equated cleanliness and order with the leisure and comfort that comes with financial stability. Maybe in your childhood, you noticed that your friends' homes whose parents both had to work full-time were always messy because they didn't have time to keep a spotless house. And that created within you the belief that messiness is a sign of inferiority. A lower social status. So, you stay awake long into the night scrubbing the kitchen floor regardless of the fatigue of your body.

Part of healthy human development – arguably at any stage of our life – is to uncover the root beliefs which cause us to behave in certain ways and choose for ourselves which beliefs we'll retain and which we'll discard.

Our prayer of supplication is from Psalm 119 in which the psalmist prayed that God would help him “put false ways far from me; and graciously teach me your law.” In other words, as we grow and mature, we look at our embedded beliefs and choose which ones are healthy and which ones are not. Then we work to put the toxic beliefs “far from me.”

The root beliefs by which the Holy Spirit grows in us the faith quality are: that *Jesus is the incarnation of the God who is love*; in other words, that Jesus is the Son of God. And that *in Jesus is an experience of life that exceeds the constraints and the struggles of our present moments*; in other words, that in Jesus is eternal life.

You can choose to believe other things. You can choose to believe that cleanliness is next to Godliness, and spend every spare minute scrubbing the house. You can choose to believe that structures, and systems, and institutions are the way to salvation, and spend your energy maintaining those systems. You can choose to believe that your value depends on your fame or that your joy depends on your possessions.

Those who want to disciple under the master named Jesus, choose to believe the testimony: “God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”³

c) The Actions of Discipleship:

I choose to believe that Jesus of Nazareth, the human child of Mary and Joseph, is the Spirit-begotten Son of God; that Jesus of Nazareth is the incarnation of the God who is love, that he is the one whom this Holy and Loving God sent to proclaim us righteous, and that in him is life that exceeds the constraints and sufferings of our present moments.

I choose to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ in whom is eternal life.

Which also means that I choose to believe that his way is the way to wholeness in myself (body, mind, and spirit), and to the redeeming, healing, and resurrection of all that exists.

Having so chosen, the action of discipleship that accompanies these beliefs is obedience to the way Jesus sends me as I walk throughout the day.

³ 1 John 5:11

And so, along the way I listen to God's Word in moments of private worship. Along the way I listen to God's Word in the regular preaching by those who God has sent to proclaim Jesus and His way. And, listening, I strive to obey.

As I learn to hear and obey God's Word, I learn to reflect on my daily experiences in prayer and I begin to see God's hand leading me in the decisions I make and in my behaviours. I also begin to see the times when I have chosen to not obey, and the consequential darkness that follows my decisions and behaviours.

As I learn to obey God's Word and begin to see God's hand leading me, I learn to trust the love of God. I learn to trust God's promises. And, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, I find my faith expanding. In the words of the psalm, as "I run the way of your commandments, you enlarge my understanding." As my faith expands, I'm more and more able to face whatever the world throws at me with love and gratitude and in the midst of the chaos I bear witness to the one who has come by water, by blood, and by Spirit for the salvation of the entirety of creation.

Glory be to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Hymn #576 "I bind unto myself today"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqzWs6KPoE> (full hymn; 8 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yH4ToVxtn9A> (first two verses only; 2 minutes)

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession;

Faithful God and Holy Friend,

We do not have enough words to thank you for all you have given us and the love you share with us in Christ Jesus.

In the silence of this time, help us review the week just past, remembering the ways we encountered you—in the beauty of creation, the support of friends, the wisdom of books, the joy of music, the energy of exercise, through study and prayer.

(A time of silence is kept.)

We are grateful for your presence in these uncertain times at home, at work and at school. We give you thanks for your attention to the small details and the large responsibilities we face.

Be with us as the months of pandemic continue. Give us patience to keep each other safe and make us attentive to the needs of those around us.

In silence we name before you those finding these days especially difficult.
(A time of silence is kept.)

We remember before you the many who struggle to recognize your presence or fail to hear your voice amid all the competing voices in our world.
We pray for those feeling depressed or anxious, those facing grief and loneliness, and those who are worried about their health or their security.
(A time of silence is kept.)

Do not forget these people even if they forget you. Comfort them and fill them with peace.

We pray for our country and all other nations facing immense challenges with COVID-19. Guide decision makers and keep the hearts of those with resources open to those who do not have enough.
We pray for places where justice is lacking, where violence threatens, or leaders are untrustworthy. Strengthen voices of wisdom and acts of courageous compassion to tend the needs of people most at risk.

You call us to be your hands and feet, your voice and comfort in the world, following the example of Jesus. Equip us to respond to the needs around us in his name and make us bold to get started right here and right now.
Amen.

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you,
the Lord be kind and gracious to you,
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.