

Worship-at-home

April 3, 2022
Fifth Sunday of Lent



“The surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus”

God calls us to worship:

God says to us: I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers flow in the desert.
The Lord does great things for us, and we rejoice.

God says to us: Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.
The Lord does great things for us, and we rejoice.

God says to us: I am about to do a new thing.
**The Lord does great things for us,
and so we worship God with songs of joy and prayers of thanksgiving.**

We offer our prayers:

O God,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all life,
we come to you today with grateful hearts,
cheered by the return of spring,
days lengthening, the sun's warmth growing stronger.
We praise you for your creation and its reliable rhythms.
We praise you, too,
for Christ and his ministry that we seek to continue;
we seek the light of the hope he offers.
Break into these days of turmoil and uncertainty
with the mercy and grace we meet in Jesus.

By the power of your Spirit, lighten our hearts in this time of worship,
and help us brighten the lives we touch this week in Jesus' name.
And so we praise you, O God,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all life,
and offer you all glory and honour,
this day and every day, now and evermore.

**Merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed.
We have not loved you
with our whole heart, mind, and strength;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy forgive what we have been,
amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be,
so that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your holy name.
Amen.**

God offers the assurance of grace:

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!
in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself,
not counting their trespasses against them.

Accept God's pardon,
and be at peace with God, with one another, and with your own self.

And give thanks to the Lord,
for He is good;
His love endures forever.

We offer our lives and resources:

Offering plates are positioned as you enter and leave the sanctuary. If you'd prefer to use e-transfers, please speak with Rev. Ian, Judy Armstrong (St. Andrew's), or Howard McKellar (Knox)

Hymn: #205 "O Love, how deep, how broad, how high"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ro78Htb7UMo>

God speaks to us in His Word:

READ: Isaiah 43:14-21
 Psalm 126
 Philippians 3:4b-14
 John 12:1-8

The surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus

1. A denarius was the equivalent of a day's wage for a labourer. Three hundred denarii were therefore nearly equivalent of a year's wages.

Nard, or, spikenard, was an oil derived from a plant of the same name that grew in the mountains of northern India. The bottle with which Mary anointed Jesus' feet was worth nearly a year's wages. Add to that, there was potential cost to Mary's reputation. Mary exposed her hair in public and assumed the role of a servant by wiping their guest's feet – and with her hair! This was an act of extravagant worship!

I suggest that it was an act of almost *unimaginably* extravagant worship!

To spend a year's wages on one act of worship; and one act of worship that was transitory. She didn't use the resource to build a church or an altar or something which could be used again. She poured it out on Jesus' feet and, presumably, on the ground.

Imagine a congregational meeting which has been called because a congregation has received a gift roughly equivalent to a year's wages. Let's suppose the gift is \$60,000. The meeting has been called to decide what to do with this money.

Mary stands up and suggests that all \$60,000 be spent on lilies. It is nearly Easter, after all, argued Mary, let's show the love of Christ by filling the sanctuary with beautiful flowers and the air with beautiful fragrance!

Judas (who suffers from allergies and asthma) stands up and argues that isn't a faithful use of the resource. Instead, the \$60,000 could be better spent as a donation to the Corunna Foodbank.

Now, while many people probably agree with Judas' logic, is it any more likely that all \$60,000 would get donated to the foodbank than it would be spent on one act of extravagant, fragrant worship?

More likely, the congregation would wrap themselves in the mantle of financial prudence and divide up the money: \$5, 000 might go to the worship fund, \$5, 000 to

the Corunna Foodbank, keep \$30,000 for themselves in GICs, and \$20,000 to repair the furnace.

Mary poured out a year's worth of wages in one extravagant act of worship.

Paul counted everything that he had ever done as garbage in comparison to knowing Christ Jesus.

The prophet Isaiah encouraged the Israelites to forget the past in light of what is yet to come in redeemed fellowship with the Lord.

The psalmist called for rejoicing as the people of Israel came back to the Promised Land – the place of quiet rest near to the heart of God.

*As hard as it might be for us to imagine the Lord assenting to Mary's actions in the face of the unrelenting needs of others, and the number of other ways that money could have been put to use, what she has done is recognize and act out the **surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord.***

2. Throughout the Lenten season we've been looking at the theme of *repentance* and exploring what it means to turn toward the Lord in our daily living.

We've talked about Sacred Space. About asking the Holy Spirit to take over our imagination and create in our mind's eye a place of refuge where we can meet the Lord and turn to him for real-time protection and shelter in our imagined-but-not-imaginary Sacred Space.

We've talked about turning to the Lord as an act of discerning true beliefs about God, self, and others from false beliefs *before* we act. These true beliefs are fostered in encounters with the Living God throughout the day, aided by the Sacred Space exercise and affirmed by the testimony of Scripture.

We've talked about opening our minds and hearts in that Sacred Space to receive the strength of the Crucified Victor and, in that light of life, confront our troubles with the grace, mercy, and peace of the triune God.

And, we've talked about turning to the Good Shepherd who is already seeking you. This involves recognizing when we've stepped out of the circle of God's love, and turning to rest in that circle from which place we can serve as ambassadors for Christ.

Today's readings add another dimension to the holy habit of regularly turning to the Lord: Worship.

3. Jesus' response to Judas was not to undermine the necessity of generous almsgiving. He was simply stating a fact. Until Christ returns and heaven and earth are eternally wed there will always be people who need help. There will always be issues that need attention. And Christians always have a responsibility to do just that in the name of Christ. But Jesus knew that in 6 days, he was going to die.

The opportunity to do good works and give generous alms has always been and will, in this current age, always be present. (The irony is that Judas had no intention of using the money for almsgiving, at least, not all of it!) But, as far as enjoying the company of Jesus, six days remained before he would be arrested, unjustly tried, and crucified.

Part of the grieving ritual in the first century world was to anoint the body with fragrant oils and herbs before burial. This helped to hide the smell of decomposition. It also provided a physical act, that took time, which allowed the mourners the space to grieve. Anointing the body provided the opportunity to accept the death and the loss.

We learn in chapter 19 that, after his crucifixion, Nicodemus anointed Jesus' body with 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes! This was an anointing for royalty.

Crucified as a criminal, anointed as a king!

Mary foreshadowed his death and burial with her extravagant offering.

As she filled the house with the fragrance of her devotion, she made a sensory declaration of the surpassing value of Christ Jesus.

Through his death, we have life.

In fellowship with the triune God who has created us and all that exists, there is perfect peace, perfect healing, perfect love. He is the very well-spring of life itself.

By opening the way to that fellowship with the Father on the cross, Jesus has restored the fortunes of those who turn to him.

This is the value of knowing Christ Jesus: Life in fellowship with the One who creates life itself!

4. Worship is the primary means by which the Lord sustains this life.

By our action of attending to the Word of God, of prayer (silent, spoken, with raised arms and folded hands, with incense and smoke, indoors and outside), of praise, and of celebrating the sacraments, the Lord sustains the life of the church in the here-and-now.

Because of allergies and asthma and the slightly misguided zeal of sixteenth-century reformers, fragrance and incense are not strong components of the Presbyterian tradition of congregated worship. And, because of fear of fire and the inconvenience of cleaning up wax, often electronic candles have replaced candles that burn. Nevertheless, whether or not you use incense or fragrances or candles as part of your private worship practices, the imagery evoked by Mary's action can be a profound help for our own acts of adoration.

The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

The poet of Psalm 141 petitioned the Lord saying:

*Let my **prayer** be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.*

Worship – both in the congregation on Sunday morning and privately throughout the other six days – is the action by which we turn our hearts and minds to the Lord; the action by which the Holy Spirit opens our hearts and minds to receive the strength of the Crucified Victor; so that, we can bear our griefs and infirmities before the world in a way that testifies to His reality. Thus, through us, the Holy Spirit diffuses and fills our societies with the mercy and grace of Christ as the fragrance filled the house.

As you look toward Palm Sunday and Holy Week and Good Friday; as you consider the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, turn to Him in extravagant

worship by giving yourself. Not only by service to others in His name, but by adoration, praise, by worship.

Rejoice as one who knows that the Lord has restored your fortune as a beloved child of the Living God.

Let your prayers become as incense before the Lord.

Let your affirmation be:

*The Lord is my song; the Lord is my praise:
all my hope comes from God.*

*The Lord is my song; the Lord is my praise:
God, the well-spring of life.*

For the health of your soul, the good of society, and the glory of God.

Amen.

Hymn: #446 “The Lord is my song”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofx9Z_ZGnds

We respond in prayers of thanksgiving and intercession:

O God in whom we live and move and have our being,
We come to you in prayer,
trusting that you are with us in the ups and downs,
the joys and sorrows of these challenging days.
We give you thanks for every sign of your presence with us,
for every unexpected kindness,
every word of comfort or encouragement,
every sign of courage in the face of injustice,
every hopeful step towards reconciliation amid conflict,
and healing in the face of disease or danger.
Thank you for your presence with us in all things.

In this unpredictable world,
we pray for those whose lives are caught up in reckless terror or planned
oppression,
and for those living in places where they are afraid to walk freely;
we remember all who find the uncertainty of our times overwhelming and
discouraging:

Add any concerns in the news, followed by 15 seconds of silence.

May those living in fear courage to go on in your company.

As the stories of Jesus turn us toward the cross, O God,
we pray for those who also walk the road of suffering.
We remember before you
those whose lives have been plunged into sorrow or despair
through tragic death,
through critical illness or chronic pain.
and through complicated problems that seem to have no end:

*Add any local or congregational concerns, followed by 15 seconds of
silence.*

May all these know your comfort and compassion.

O God, the stories of Jesus show us
that he faced the clamour of many demands
and the pressure of many critics.
We pray for all those who are exhausted these days,
juggling more demands and fewer resources in their work or at home,
for those who cannot seem to get it right, whatever they do,
and for all those facing unfair criticism and expectations
in the responsibilities they bear on behalf of others.

Add any relevant concerns, followed by 15 seconds of silence.

May all these be strengthened by your Spirit of justice and mercy.

O God, we need the embrace of your presence, each in our own way.
Anoint us with your Spirit of healing and hope,
and bring peace to our lives and this world you love
for the sake of Christ Jesus who taught us to pray together:

The Lord's Prayer

God sends us with God's blessing:

Hymn: #204 "Thou didst leave thy throne"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGRodJau3oQ>

Blessing