

Worship on November 17, 2024

(CCLI: License Number #3156883) (Welcoming Elder: Dr. Robert Revington)

Sunday Order of worship

We Gather

- Welcome and Announcements
- Call to worship
- Praise song BOP 637 Take my life and let it be
- Prayer for worship and Lord's Prayer
- Words of Assurance
- Praise song BOP 625 Seek ye first
- Sung prayer for illumination (BOP 445 Open our eyes, Lord)
- First reading: Deuteronomy 10:12-22
- Second reading: Psalm 104:5-13 (Refrain 1)
- Third reading: Luke 12:16-21
- Sermon: Not mine, but ours! (*Video sermon by Bonnie Marden, leadership consultant and financial stewardship practitioner.*)
- Hymn BOP 712 Arise, your light is come
- Prayer for the people

We Respond

- Offering, Doxology (BOP 830) & Dedication
- Song for the Journey BOP 487 Onward, Christian soldiers

We Serve

- Benediction
- A Sung Blessing

Welcome and Announcement:

Responsive call to worship: (based on Jeremiah 23:1-6)

One: God asks, "Why have you not attended to my creation and shared the abundance of this world?"

All: God notices the chaos and destruction occurring in the world. We have been scattered and driven apart from each other.

One: Isolation and fear keep us at a distance from each other, and from God.

All: We have drifted from God's fold in search of creature comforts

One: Only to discover that we have forgotten the promise of God's provision.

All: The Lord God promises to gather the lost and lonely, bringing us back to safety:

One: "I will raise up leaders who will care for my creation and for each other and they shall know fear no longer."

All: Sing for joy today as God's righteousness is at hand and we are witnesses to God's justice.

Praise song – BOP 637 Take my life and let it be

Prayer of Adoration

Giving and Generous God, Who created all things and called them good, We delight in the vast diversity to life. At your invitation, we gather today for worship and prayer, We gather in awe, that you have called us to care for your creation, as stewards of your world, Surrounded by people whose generosity inspires us.

Too often we are preoccupied by looking after ourselves and caring for others, And we forget that the future is created by actions we take today. Things we consume and acquire draw us away from your beloved community. We settle for worldly pleasures and treasures; When you have promised us the power to create, to love, to heal. Forgive us for so easily squandering these gifts.

Prayer of confession (Unison) *(With the Prayer of confession, let us come to God together)*

Move our hearts, O God. Help us loosen our grip on all we claim to be “mine”.

Open our hearts, Holy Spirit, to receive the gifts and power you offer us.

Align our hearts, Christ Jesus, to faithfully steward the creation that is “ours”.

Heavenly Father, hear us, as we offer the Prayer that Jesus taught us: *(The Lord’s Prayer:)*

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Be not dismayed by what we have left undone or neglected in this lifetime, for we are forgiven. God’s promise is that plans have been made for us; plans that include hope and a future. Hope springs from unexpected places, from the gifts of grace and forgiveness, given and received. As forgiven Children of God, the Love of God flows through us so that we can offer this same gift to others.

May the Peace of the Lord be with you. *(Let us bless each other with the peace of the Lord.)*

Praise song – BOP 625 Seek ye first

Prayer for children

Sung prayer for illumination (BOP 445 Open our eyes, Lord)

- First reading: Deuteronomy 10:12-22
- Second reading: Psalm 104:5-13 (Refrain 1)
- Third reading: Luke 12:16-21

“This is the word of the Lord / Thanks be to God.”

SERMON: Not mine, but ours!

Teach us Your ways, O God, that we might be known as wise and faithful stewards.

I read somewhere that most people spend the first half of their lives collecting things and the second half trying to get rid of things. As I listen to friends cleaning out their parents' homes and "down-sizing", it appears we do a better job during the first half of our lives than the second!

Do you have a piece of furniture that you have been saving – just in case your kids or neighbors need it? Or a few sets of shoes or socks stashed away – just in case you run out? Have you noticed that we sometimes have so many things that cleaning out our closets feels like Christmas as we discover things we forgot we stored away?

Our consumer culture skillfully motivates us to want more, newer, faster, better. You know what I mean. And, yes, this drives our economy, so we just have to play along, right?

The flaw in this theory is that too often accumulation occurs for those who already have too much and on the backs of those with more limited options. It uses more and more of our natural resources, and creates more and more waste, hurting the natural environment God created.

Still, consumerism impacts people at all economic levels—it is an equal opportunity addiction! No matter how much we have, we never feel like we have enough.

Yes, I said addiction. And this addiction often comes with a powerful word we utter almost unconsciously. I remember with a mixture of awe and dismay when my young children first grabbed hold of a toy and with vigor and conviction uttered that powerful word: "Mine!"

What does our faith say about living a life dedicated to the care and protection of material things? To this idea of "Mine!"

Today, in our scripture lesson, we hear about a person who is collecting and storing up treasures. I wonder, and suspect you are wondering, what they were storing these treasures up for? Was it for personal gratification or planning for a rainy day? Some families, communities, and even churches store up resources for a rainy day, and then act as if a rainy day will never come, even as we wonder how to connect with a community where the message of God is viewed as ancient and irrelevant . . .but that is a sermon for another day.

Back to the person enjoying and feasting on stored-up treasures. Aren't we all inclined to store up treasures, if we are able? Aren't we told that good financial planning requires thinking ahead, saving and preparing for a yet-to-be-lived future, especially through these rollercoaster-like times?

So, this person is happy with their accumulated goods. We don't know exactly what they have accumulated—maybe grain, cloth, jewels, who knows—but we do know that this stored up treasure is the source of great satisfaction and pleasure.

But then the person learns that they will die that very night! No retirement. No bucket list. It doesn't seem fair, and yet a good reality check.

The past few years have been a jarring reminder that every day is a gift. Tomorrow is uncertain and our journey home to God can occur at any time. Today is all we can be certain of.

I realize I am treading in dangerous territory, but Jesus' parables are provocative. It is hard to face the reality of our own humanity. And yet this scripture today invites us to live into this powerful possibility and promise.

What if the calling of a disciple of Christ, as Mahatma Gandhi is credited with saying, is to "live simply so that others may simply live"?

Marie Kondo offers similar wisdom in her 2014 book titled *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*. In addition to tips on how to declutter and organize your life, (I like the how-to-fold-your-socks tip), she offers a ritual to offer things back into the cycle of life. Whatever clothing, books or knick-knacks you are ready to give away, she suggests holding them in our hands, saying, "You have served me well—I release you back into creation." How liberating to free ourselves from objects that fill our drawers, closets and physical space! This can be a radical experience.

A few years ago, a campaign to fight malaria in Africa used this tag line: If anyone has malaria, we all have malaria. This powerful mind shift acknowledges that our needs – and blessings - are not just "MINE" – they are OURS.

Here is one example of how the shift from mine to ours can impact ministry.

A minister discovered that benevolence donations were being collected and stored in a member's home, to be distributed when needed. While the member felt that the funds were her responsibility to protect, the minister knew that it wasn't a safe practice for either the church or the member.

To shift the church's culture around benevolence funds, the minister bought a small wooden box shaped like a church and placed it in the sanctuary. All were invited to offer gifts into the box as they were able. The collection process became public—it became ours. The minister was astonished to discover a check for \$1,000 in the box shortly after introducing it. By making the discretionary/compassionate/benevolent offering process part of the whole community—it not only became ours— it also grew!

Today, we honor generosity through legacy gifts. On this day, we celebrate the impact of shifting stewardship of life's blessings from mine to ours.

In today's parable, we are warned about the temptation to build barns to store what has been accumulated during our lifetime. We don't know how or why the person became wealthy. It could have been from good luck, hard work or built on the exploitation of others. However, we do know that his actions focused on protecting treasures rather than sharing them.

Financial planners talk about the concept of our "short-term and long-term time horizon". Are we looking to just get through today or are we thinking about what life could be far into the future? An example of long-term planning is the person who plants trees recognizing that they are starting a project that will bless others in the future!

So how does our faith help us reconcile the advice and wisdom of financial advisors who teach us to save and invest for the future with this parable that reminds us all we really have is today?

I invite you to think about planned giving as any action that connects our decisions today, with the promise of a positive impact on the future. The spiritual gift of generosity through planned

gifts is a future blessing, not a short-lived pleasure. It is a way to share the treasures we have built up when we no longer need them.

It doesn't even take a lot of treasures to bless others. You don't have to be wealthy to make an impact on future generations.

Many churches have scholarships and endowments created less than 100 years ago with gifts of \$500 dollars or less. Because of the long-term time horizon and accumulated interest as well as investment growth, those funds now provide thousands of dollars for mission and ministry today!

These gifts were made by real and ordinary people – like you and me – who chose the joy that comes from rejecting the concept that all that matters is MINE. They invested in possibilities that their future outlook created for OUR world. They lived with an OUR perspective—inviting us to think about OUR world, OUR future, OUR opportunity to create future possibilities—through our actions TODAY!

In the end, what does the Lord require of us? We hear that answer in our Old Testament scripture... to love and serve God with all our hearts and souls. What is important to our God? Executing justice for the orphan and the widow and caring for the stranger. What if we think about how our lives and our estates – whatever is left when we go home to God – care for our community and continue to share God's love with the world.

You may be thinking, a planned gift or estate planning is hard. You don't have the time to set one up. Yes, our last will and testament is best created with legal counsel, but the hardest part of the process is usually our reluctance to shift from thinking about what we have accumulated to what we decide to release back into the realm of God's creation by giving it to others.

Here is another way to think about this opportunity.

We have incredible power to create the future today. If you think you don't have resources to make a difference, think about the individuals and families that made \$100 or \$500 gifts in the early 1900's, who would be thrilled to hear that their gifts are now worth thousands of dollars supporting the ministries they chose.

A gift of \$1,000—with the assumption of 5% growth and reinvested annually—could be worth \$131,501 in 100 years! That's the power of a future oriented time horizon!

And when that gift joins the gifts of others who are also thinking of the future, the growth exceeds our imagination.

Imagine what a different ending Jesus' parable might have had if the Rich Fool, rather than storing up treasure for personal pleasure, shared even a portion of those resources for the benefit of God's creation. What if the Rich Fool had left a plan to distribute some of the remaining treasures after this life, to participate in God's mission. Jesus could have pointed out the Widow and Orphans Feeding Ministry, the Home for Desert Wanderers, and the Camel Care and Protection Fund – all founded by the one we know as the "Wise Planner" rather than the "Rich Fool".

What will delight your heart and soul in 20, 50, or 100 years from now because it exists—because you planted the seeds of your generosity with a vision for something that could exist in the future?

Rather than barns (or basements, or closets) to store our stuff, what if we shifted our focus to using our gifts as seeds for the future? What might be your legacy?

The empowering message of this parable is that we do not need to settle for barns when we have a future to create! Jesus invites us to see beyond the stuff of this world to the future we are creating in our hearts and minds—a future where hunger, sickness, economic injustice, homelessness and war no longer exist because people have invested in sharing and caring, in equity and security for all persons and in building God's beloved community.

Are you ready to change your focus from what is MINE to what is possible when we see God's way, and see the world as OURS? God and the world are waiting for us to choose. May each of us discover the power of generosity in this life! Amen

Praise song – BOP 712 Arise, your light is come

Prayer for the people

God of Creation and Vision, You birthed us from your creation, Called it Good and called us Stewards. Into the world and our communities, you pour resources and visions, Help us see your vision and the tools you place at our disposal. Give us courage and faith to be stewards for all peoples, in all places And to build your beloved community in this time and space.

God of Grace and God of Glory, You have blessed us day by day. Ours is the gift of love and praise, Power and promise to live Your Way. Guide each step of our lives and fill our hearts with the desire to be good steward of yours. Teach us the mind of togetherness, not seeking "mine" only, but to seek "ours" together.

We pray for the people in need of our prayers. There are people with physical pains. Precious Lord, embrace them. Hold them in your arms and with your power, heal them. Store their health as well as their hearts. There are difficulties in relationships. Reconcile them with your peace. There are grieving. Walk with them and comfort them. If there are other challenges and difficulties, give them faith, empower them in their situations, and provide them what they need. We praise and worship you. Be lifted and be glorified. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

Invitation to the offering:

God's goodness fills the world, Equip our eyes to see it. God's goodness fills the world, Inviting our hands to share what God has given us. All Our gifts come from God's goodness, Today we pass that goodness along to others in Jesus' name. As we praise and worship God with our gifts, let us glorify him with all our hearts. Let the offering be received. BOP #830, Doxology.

Offering prayer:

Gracious God and generous God and glorious God. Thank you for this time of offering. Use our gifts and use us for your kingdom. Help us not focus only on me, but help us focus ours. Be praised and worshipped through us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Song for the Journey – BOP 487 Onward, Christian soldiers

Now, it is the time for us to be sent to the world where God called us to be. Where is our focus? Are we only caring for mine? Let us have bigger mindset. With the eyes of God, let us try to become good stewards of what we have received and blessed from God.

Benediction: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. Amen.