

Sunday, November 15, 2020

Lectionary 33, Year A

Introduction

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.

CALL TO WORSHIP

We have indeed been blessed by God.

And God calls forth from us both thanksgiving and accountability.

To be faithful to God, we must take risks for God.

Yes, as stewards we are to use wisely all that God has entrusted to us.

We seek to do this in ways that are both compassionate and just.

For where one is in need, there are we to be found sharing the gifts of God.

Let us learn more about this as we worship --

This to prepare us for the living of our daily lives.

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Silence is kept for reflection.

Holy One,

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.

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

Through † Jesus you are forgiven, by Jesus you are welcome, in Jesus you are called to rejoice! Let us live in the promises prepared for us from the foundation of the world. **Amen.**

Prayer of the Day

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. **Amen.**

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.

⁷Be 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.

¹²At 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.”

¹³Their 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.

¹⁴The 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.

¹⁵That 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,

¹⁶a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements.

¹⁷I 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.

¹⁸Neither 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.

Psalm: Psalm 90:1-12

¹Lord, you have been our refuge from one generation to another.

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

³You turn us back to the dust and say, “Turn back, O children of earth.”

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

⁵you sweep them away like a dream, they fade away suddenly like the grass:

⁶**in the morning it is green and flourishes;
in the evening it is dried up and withered.**

⁷For we are consumed by your anger; we are afraid because of your wrath.

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

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

¹⁰**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.**

¹¹Who regards the power of your wrath? Who rightly fears your indignation?

¹²**So teach us to number 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.

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

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.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁴"For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then 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.' ²¹His 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.' ²²And 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.' ²³His 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.' ²⁴Then 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; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' ²⁶But 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?' ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For 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. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Prayers of Intercession

Pastor: 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.

Leader: 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.

Your mercy is great.

Leader: 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.

Your mercy is great.

Leader: 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.

Your mercy is great.

Pastor: 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 *especially we name in our hearts and out loud...* Send us as encouragement and signs of your healing.

Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Leader: 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.

Your mercy is great.

Pastor: 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. **Amen.**

Offering Prayer

God of all goodness, generations have turned to you, gathered around your table, and shared your abundant blessings. Number us among them that, as we gather these gifts from your abundance, and give thanks for your rich blessings, we may feast upon your very self and care for all that you have made, through Jesus Christ, our Sovereign and Servant. **Amen.**

Blessing

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 you reason to rejoice and be glad!

The blessing of God, Sovereign, ✠ Savior, and Spirit, be with you today and always. **Amen.**

Dismissal

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

Thanks be to God.