

Twenty-Fourth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/A)  
Psalm 90;1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30  
November 14-15, 2020  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

We've all heard someone ask the question, "When will 2020 be over??" "Will it **ever** be over??" Maybe **we're** the one who asked -- if not out loud, at least in our heart. It's been a tough year, for so many reasons. But this weekend's lessons calls us onto the carpet, cautions us, if we're wearying of COVID restrictions, falling into complacency, throwing up our hands. We're told if we all wear masks, we can save over 100,000 lives in the upcoming months before the vaccine is available. So the question is: as individuals, do we have the self-discipline, as a society, do we have the corporate will, to sign on to the saving protocols that will save ourselves **and** our neighbors?

I've been reading *The Splendid and the Vile*, a new release by Erik Larson about Churchill's first year as Great Britain's Prime Minister, 1940-1941. It was the worst year of the Blitz, Nazi Germany's furious bombing of London and other English cities, trying to cow the British into capitulating or to weaken them to the point that a German invasion would be possible. The suffering on the ground was immense. There was terror, there was death and destruction, there were food shortages, but there was also a community willingness to do whatever was necessary to endure and emerge victorious. After the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, there was similar will on our side of the Atlantic to endure any hardship, to accept shortages, to sacrifice whatever was necessary to achieve victory. So a letter to the editor I read in Friday's paper really spoke to me:

For the country to refuse to take all measures to face this virus head on is tantamount to my parents' generation deciding eight months into World War II that it was tired of all the sacrifice called for and insisting that we just declare a great victory and go home.

Our greatest strength was our determination to face adversity together and endure. Is that lost on us now?<sup>1</sup>

Hopefully not. In the past week I've become aware of more of our church family and friends being afflicted with COVID than at any time during the pandemic. If we're going to be faithful stewards of our own and others' health we don't have the luxury of becoming so irritated with restrictions that we ignore them. "As one public service announcement says, "Wear a mask to protect and out of respect."

The late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> century American author, poet, minister Henry Van Dyke (born in Germantown, PA, educated at Princeton) wrote:

Time is too slow for those who wait, too swift for those who fear, too long for those who grieve, too short for those who rejoice, but for those who love, time is eternity.

We find an even more memorable mention of time in Psalm 90, assigned for this weekend:

*<sup>12</sup>So teach us to count [or number] our days  
that we may gain a wise heart.*

The psalmist isn't despairingly staring at an hour glass as the sand runs out. The psalmist is asking God to remind us that our time on this earth is finite, so that we'll use the precious gift of time **well** and so we remember we'll be held accountable for how we **spent**, how we **invested**, our precious days and years. We **won't** "kill" time till "happy days are here again" – we **won't** wish away the rest of the year of our Lord 2020 – we **will** embrace each day as a gift, either for the blessings it contains or for the challenges it poses that will allow our faith to mature and deepen. "Yesterday's history. Tomorrow's mystery. Today's a gift. That's why it's called the present."

We don't have a crystal ball to know what tomorrow holds, no less next year. But we have a merciful God whom the end of Psalm 90 addresses:

Have compassion on your servants!  
<sup>14</sup>Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,  
 so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.  
<sup>15</sup>Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us,  
 and as many years as we have seen evil.  
<sup>16</sup>Let your work be manifest to your servants,  
 and your glorious power to their children.  
<sup>17</sup>Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,  
 and prosper for us the work of our hands –  
 O prosper the work of our hands!

We can't ask our God to prosper the work of our hands without actively working on God's behalf. We do that with the talents our Lord has given each of us. Today's parable of the talents reminds us of the reality that God gifts all of God's children with special abilities. These God-given talents aren't meant to be used only for our own good but for that of others. We are given Kingdom credentials; we're all blessed with holy talents to invest in growing the Kingdom and serving God's children. We're to offer

them with abandon! We're to throw ourselves passionately into all the channels through which faith becomes active in love!

We're not to compare ourselves with others and say, "Compared to them, what I have to bring is too measly to offer." No, we are each to embrace the gifts God has given us in particular, to love the personality God has given us in particular, to walk through the doors the Holy Spirit opens to us in particular, and to make our unique contribution to the bubbling up of the Kingdom in this place at this time. We may feel small, like a tiny piece in a thousand-piece puzzle. But Heaven knows, if one piece is missing the whole puzzle is ruined. We're not to resent the gifts others have that we **wish** we had – we're to identify and proudly claim and wholeheartedly invest the gifts God **has** given **us**. We're to do it today – because tomorrow is not guaranteed to any of us. Because time is precious. Because our lives are finite. Because God has Kingdom work charted out for us to do **today**. Tomorrow we'll have a new assignment!

Toward the end of the Fourth Gospel Jesus says to Peter:

*"Very truly I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go."* (John 21:18)

While we have life and breath and freedom and ability, let's make much of the time we have and invest the gifts we've received in helping God's kingdom to come, God's will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

*So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good [... grow weary in doing what it right]. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up, or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all....* (Galatians 6:9-10a)

Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

<sup>1</sup>*New York Times* (November 13, 2020), A24.