

Greetings members and friends of the First Congregational Church of Shelburne,

This Sunday is Stewardship Sunday at First Congregational Church. Your Stewardship team has sent out letters and pledge cards encouraging you to “thoughtfully and prayerfully offer our pledges with the faith that that commitment will affect lives within our church community and far beyond.” Please fill out your card and mail it back to the church at 21 Common Road, in Shelburne, MA 01370.

The attached Worship Resource is designed with Stewardship in mind. The video for this Sunday will include a presentation by Judith Kulp, a member of the Stewardship team.

Next Sunday is Thanksgiving Sunday and we will be giving thanks for all of God’s blessings as well as remembering and celebrating our congregation’s 250th anniversary in prayer. We hope that we can celebrate this anniversary in a much larger way once it is safe to do so.

Faithfully Yours,

Pastor Rob

Welcome to Sunday Worship

November 15, 2020

Good Morning to our members and friends at home,

This Sunday is Stewardship Sunday and is designed to celebrate and give thanks to God for the ministries we are called to at First Congregational Church of Shelburne.

Prayer Requests: We are accepting requests for prayer (healing, comfort, thanksgiving, and others). Please send your requests to the Pastor at pastor01089@gmail.com. Requests will then be sent out through our email list to the congregation for our common prayer life during the week. PLEASE remember that all prayer requests received become public knowledge. If you are uncertain if your request for another might be confidential, do not send it.

And now let us be in worship

Morning Unison Prayer & the Lord’s Prayer

O God, in mystery you are present in our lives. You bring new life out of destruction, hope out of despair, growth out of difficulty. We thank you that we are not left alone, but that you hold us in all times and places. Help us to see your hand in our lives, that we may not only know of you, but strive to do your will. For the sake of Christ who taught us to pray saying...*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

Prayers of the People

Our prayers on this Stewardship Sunday offer thanksgiving, intercession for others, and prayers for the ministries we are called to at First Congregational Church of Shelburne.

This day, O Lord, we have praise on our lips, for of all that we know, all that we experience, of all that seeks to distract us, only you, O God, deserve praise and worship. We give you thanks for the goodness in this world.

For the loving and the lovable. For the moments of joy, the birth of a baby, the kind word spoken in times of trial, the unexpected kindness, unlooked for tenderness, Gracious God, for these things and more, we give our thanks. Hear our prayers of gratitude.....

We come this day, O Lord, with concerns for others. For those who are ill, hospitalized and at home. For those recovering from surgery and sickness. We pray for your healing touch. We pray for those who mourn, that they may find comfort and healing. We pray for all who are in need this day, known to us and only known to you. Hear our prayers on behalf of others....

This day, O Lord, we pray for our call to ministry. We praise your name, O God, for you call us to discipleship in the name of Christ, to care for the sick, to cheer the broken of heart, to work for the welfare of others, to welcome the friend and the stranger alike, regardless of where they live or who they may be. We pray for all the ministries that we offer this day and the ones yet to be born in our congregation,

Ministries of worship, sacrament, prayer & music.

Ministries of care, council, and comfort.

Ministries of education.

Ministries of youth and of age.

Ministries of mission and outreach.

Ministries that touch us and our community.

For these ministries we pray and for all those who are called to them and are devoted to them. Grant that we may always be good stewards of the Gospel and use all at our disposal for bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to all who need to hear it. This day, we confess, O God, that we often fall short of all we might yet do, there are times when your voice is distant, and we turn our ears to the music of the world instead. Still, you beckon to us, bringing us back, with the music of our faith, of our tradition, and of the Gospel.

And for this, we are most grateful. Amen.

Stewardship Moment: Judith Kulp (on Sunday Video)

Scripture Reading: Matthew 25:1-13

Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning

Our reading for today, from the Gospel according to Matthew, takes place following Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Throughout the day, Jesus has been teaching in the temple and has now left the city, with his disciples, to the Mount of Olives. It is here that Jesus speaks only to his closest companions, teaching them of the Kingdom of God by a collection of parables. This morning's narrative from Matthew's Gospel is often referred to as the Parable of the Ten Maidens.

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’

Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’

But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the

other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Here ends the scripture lesson for today.

After the reading, you may reflect on these passages and share your thoughts.
There is a set of notes concerning this text for your reflection.

Benediction:

May God our Creator renew in us
the creative Spirit that brings healing and life to our world.

May Jesus the Christ uphold us in grace and love.

May the Holy Spirit fill us with courage to be bearers of God's song of hope in the world.

Amen.

Notes on the text

Today's text tells the story of a wedding or more specifically, of waiting for the groom. In those days, the bridesmaids waited for the groom to come to the bride's house for the marriage ritual. It was a part of the wedding tradition. Unlike today when we have everything set for a specific time. Back then, you were not exactly sure when the groom might show up. But you knew that he would. So, the story is told about waiting for the groom. In the story there are two groups of bridesmaids, those who are prepared and those who are not. Those who are prepared welcome the groom and enter the house. Those who are not, miss the groom and end up outside in the cold. The one point of this parable is to be prepared. It's about keeping your lamps trimmed and burning! If you should be asked, as a member of First Church of Shelburne, why do we encourage public church weddings, and public church funerals? How would you answer? Are weddings only for the bride? and perhaps the groom? Are funerals only for one who has gone home to God, and perhaps the immediate family? In one congregation there was a couple who were finally ready to be married. They also had no financial support. No funds to draw on to provide the typical lavish affair our culture has grown accustomed to. For those who need to know the average cost of a wedding in Massachusetts is in excess of 43 K. Our soon to be married couple had scant funding even as they were faithful Christians. If they had added up all the pledges they had made and kept to their church in the ten years they had been members, it would have been enough to provide a modest wedding celebration. Instead, they saw and felt the joy of giving to the ministries of their church and the many lives they helped to touch. The pastor, who met with the couple to talk about their marriage and who knew about their lack of disposable income, suggested they consider incorporating their wedding ceremony into a Sunday morning service. That way, the pastor said, the whole congregation could celebrate with them in worship and continue that celebration at the fellowship hour that followed in the hall." Yes, they said, we would love that. On the Sunday of the service, the pastor arrived early to be sure everything was ready to go. The flower ladies of the church had appeared, like elves in the night, and placed white bouquets in the windows, set up the candle arbor and draped them in

ivy. A wedding candle had been made by some anonymous church saint and placed on the altar. The hall was set with tables that were strewn with flowers. The punch bowls were out. Platters of “finger food” were quietly being dropped off in the kitchen, as the ushers and greeters were pinning on their corsages. The pastor noticed that the first two pews were already filled with teenagers. These were the church teen pack. They were friends, confirmands, Church School buddies. They were an ever-present part of the church family and they wanted to see this wedding up close. They knew the bride and groom. They wanted to know what a covenant of marriage was about. They wanted to be prepared, if and when, they should find themselves ready to make a covenant of marriage before the eyes of God and a gathered congregation. Sometimes, weddings are for those who come in order to be prepared. As Christians, we gather for funerals as much for the support of the family and to mourn our loss, as we do to prepare ourselves for the inevitable point in time when people will gather to support us when we suffer the loss of a loved one, or when they gather in thanksgiving for our life. If you should ask why it is Christians do certain things over and over again, it is because we have this need to be prepared. In today’s Parable of the Ten Maidens and their vigil for the bridegroom, Jesus makes the point that being prepared is a way of life for the Christian. We are encouraged to watch. To wait. To stay awake. Stay alert. To keep our lamps trimmed and burning lest we miss the coming of the divine or God’s sudden arrival in our lives might take us by surprise. This parable asks questions that go deeper than am I prepared for a power outage, have I saved enough cash for college or have I studied enough to get the degree? It does not address the issues that we might imagine when we ask ourselves are we prepared. It does ask such things as:

Are we prepared for baptism into the body of Christ?

Are we prepared to be a disciple of Christ?

Are we prepared to eat at Christ’s table?

Are we prepared for the day we are called from this life?

Are we prepared to see God face to face?

Late one evening a single mother held her tiny daughter in her arms, rocking her, rocking her ever so gently. It had been a series of long days. The child had been dreadfully ill, with a high fever and had become dehydrated. Hours were spent in the ER waiting room. A day spent in a stark hospital room and another day home, alone. No time for rest. Only rocking, rocking. And finally, her daughter felt cooler to the touch. The redness of fever was gone. The tiny body taking on that regular rhythm of sleep. Exhausted, she put her daughter in her crib and walked down the hall to her bedroom. Suddenly there was a solid ray of morning sun breaking in through her bedroom window, flooding the room with its soft warm light. Standing there the weary mother heard, or felt, a voice. “Peace,” said the voice. “Be still,” said the voice. “All is well.” When she shared this story with her pastor, the minister responded as most of us would, “That’s amazing! What did you think? Were you stunned?” “I remember thinking,” she replied. “Well, I guess this is it.” “This is what?” her pastor asked. “I thought, this is the day that Christ has come very close to me. I expected it. I prayed for it. I knew it would happen one day. This, I thought, this is the day.” My friends are we prepared? Are we prepared for Christ to come close to us? Are we prepared to answer the call to ministry and be prepared to fully participate in that call?