



LAKE OF BAYS PASTORAL CHARGE

Knox, Dorset – 9:00 a.m.

Stewart Memorial, Dwight – 10:15 a.m.

Pioneer, Hillside– 11:30 a.m.

Sunday Worship, November 19, 2023

Minister: Rev Meg Jordan (705-789-6600) jordanm@vianet.ca

lakeofbayspastoralcharge196@gmail.com

Bookkeeper/Administrator: Linda Pinkerton

Leadership Chair: Jennifer Parker

Musician, Knox: Cynthia MacLean

SEASON OF EMERGENCE

- Nov 22** Leadership Team Christmas Card Blitz 12 noon
- Nov 23** Sacred Circle Dance @ Pioneer 6:30-8 p.m.
We will dance for **WORLD PEACE**
- Nov 26** Reign of Christ Communion in each faith community
- Nov 27** Rev Meg away until Dec 4th Pastoral care provided by our VAM Rev. Donna B-W
- Nov 29** **ENGAGE MUSKOKA** Climate Action FilmFest
Algonquin Theatre , 7 pm,
- Dec 3** First Sunday of Advent-Birth Pangs of New Life
- Dec 17** Luncheon & Police led Info session at Pioneer
Topic: Keeping safe in the Worldwide Web.
- Dec 24** Joint service @ Stewart Memorial 10:30 a.m.
Knox United: 5 p.m
Pioneer Memorial 7 p.m. w. The Larks
- Dec 31** New Year's Eve joint service Pioneer 10:30am
This will be a unique service focused around entering the New Year by walking the path of a Labyrinth

Sunday,, November 19, 2023

All music reproduced under OneLicence #734030-A Valid for: 04/06/2023 – 04/05/2024
WE GATHER

**Welcome, Life and Work of the Church
Lighting of the Christ Candle
Acknowledgement of the Land**

Gathering prayer

From many homes and many places

we come to our church home.

With many concerns and many joys

we come to our church home.

With memories rich and painful

we come to our church home.

Bringing all that we have,

and all that we are,

We come, seeking a blessing.

**We shall not leave disappointed
for God is with us.**

Come, let us worship God.

Opening Hymn: Who is My Mother? MV#178

**Who is my mother,
who is my brother?
all those who gather round Jesus Christ:
Spirit-blown people
born from the Gospel
sit at the table, round Jesus Christ.**

**Differently abled,
differently labeled,
widen the circle round Jesus Christ,
crutches and stigmas,
culture's enigmas,
all come together round Jesus Christ.**

**Love will relate us --
color or status
can't segregate us, round Jesus Christ:
family failings,
human derailings --
all are accepted, round Jesus Christ.**

**Bound by one vision,
met for one mission
we claim each other, round Jesus Christ:
here is my mother,
here is my brother,
kindred in Spirit, through Jesus Christ**

Prayer of Approach (unison)

O Holy One,
we long to open our hearts to you,
to love you with all that we are,
all that we have,
and all that we are becoming
May the door of our hearts
open just enough
to remember what it's like to trust,
to allow Spirit light
to illumine and lead us closer to you.
Amen.

Silent Prayer of confession led by Singing Bowl**Assurance of Pardon**

We are loved. We are forgiven.
Let us open ourselves to receiving that love and that forgiveness.
Let us open ourselves, like Jesus, to become co-creators with God.

WE LISTEN

Scripture: Matthew 25:14-30

Gradual Hymn: In the Bulb There is a Flower VU#703

- 1 In the bulb there is a flower;
in the seed, an apple tree;
in cocoons, a hidden promise:
butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter
there's a spring that waits to be,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

- 2 There's a song in every silence,
seeking word and melody;
there's a dawn in every darkness,
bringing hope to you and me.
From the past will come the future;
what it holds, a mystery,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

3 In our end is our beginning;
in our time, infinity;
in our doubt there is believing;
in our life, eternity.
In our death, a resurrection;
at the last, a victory,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

Reflection:

True growth. God's growth

*A sermon by Rev Meg Jordan
based on the wonderful work of Debie Thomas.*

“For 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. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

These are the chilling words that end the “Parable of the Talents,” in our Gospel reading for today.

This is a story we usually associate in the church with stewardship. As in: our Master (God) has entrusted each one of us with “talents” (money, assets, abilities, strengths), and God expects us to invest those talents boldly and creatively for the sake of the Kingdom. If we do so, God will praise and reward us accordingly. But if we “bury” our talents, refusing to invest them as God desires, God will consider us “worthless” stewards, and we will suffer the unpleasant consequences of our master’s displeasure.

Yet again, in case it isn’t obvious already, I’m not fond of this parable and its all-too-common interpretation. I worry about the unexamined assumption at its heart — the assumption that the slave-master in the story is God. I guess if we’re okay with descriptions of God that render God (even metaphorically) as a harsh and punitive slave master, then that makes sense. But, who are we inadvertently erasing or harming? What histories, legacies, and communities are we sidelining when we promote such toxic representations of the Divine?

For me, the metaphor of God-as-wealthy-slave-master doesn’t align with the gracious and justice-oriented God Jesus describes throughout the Gospels — the God who privileges the poor, blesses the meek, frees the prisoner, feeds the hungry, clothes the

naked, liberates the slave, and protects the orphan. I can't reconcile the God Jesus incarnates among the peasant multitudes with a greedy estate owner who "reaps where he doesn't sow, and gathers where he doesn't scatter." And I don't recognize the kingdom of God in a story where those who have plenty receive still more, while those who have close to nothing lose even the little they have — and then face God's wrath on top of those losses.

So what should we do with the parable? How shall we read it? A new faith companion I have found named Debie Thomas had a conversation with her son about it. She read him the parable of the talents, fully expecting him to hate it — and he astonished her with his reaction: "That's a great passage!" he said. "It sums up everything Christianity is about. I love it!" Baffled, she asked him what exactly he "loved." "Oh, isn't it obvious? I love how the third slave is the hero of the story!"

Really? Needless to say, he son's reaction to the parable sent Debie down a different research path than she might otherwise have taken. She discovered that it is very possible to see the third slave as the "hero" of the story. Especially when the parable is heard *descriptively* rather than *prescriptively*. What if the parable is not about a punishing God at all? What if it's about us and our values and the way we live here and now?

My research led me to the work of New Testament professor, William Herzog and his wonderful book, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*.

First—we have to look at the context: In Jesus's day, "talents" were not coins or small wads of cash. They were hefty precious metals (usually gold or silver) that weighed somewhere between 80 and 130 pounds. A single talent was worth approximately twenty years of an ordinary laborer's wages. In other words, a talent represented a staggering amount of money to Jesus's peasant audience. An unthinkable, lottery-jackpot-sum that only the wealthiest elite might possess.

How did the elite in Jesus' day amass that kind of wealth? They lent money to the farming poor at exorbitant interest, and systematically stripped those debtors of their land. Often the people who took such loans — at rates between 60 and 200% — did so out of desperation, putting their fields up as collateral in last-ditch efforts to save their livelihoods. Inevitably, their efforts would fail. Drought would hit, or a debtor would grow ill, or a crop would yield too little. At that point, the staggering interest rates a farmer had agreed to would kick in and force foreclosure, and the poor farmer would have no choice but to surrender his ancestral land, watch as the wealthy elite repurposed his fields for profit, and join the multitudes of landless day laborers who couldn't know from day to day where their bread would come from.

This, Herzog writes, is the situation Jesus describes in the Parable of the Talents. The three slaves in the story are the wealthy master's "retainers" or household bureaucrats — essentially, the middle-men who oversee the land and the workers, collect the debts, and keep the profits coming while the master travels on business. It is understood by everyone involved that the slaves are free to make a little extra on the side — by charging the farmers additional fees or interest — as long as they keep the money flowing for their master. In this scenario, the slaves' status, wealth, and well-being are inextricably tied to the master's. The more money they make for him, the better and more comfortable their own lives become.

What happens when we read the parable of the talents through the cultural and economic lens Herzog offers? A member of the wealthy 1% gives three of his most trusted workers a jackpot to play with. They know the rules — the more they make for the boss, the more they'll get to keep for themselves. The name of the game is exploitation — no questions asked — and the only rule is: turn a profit. Turn as huge a profit as possible.

Two of the slaves do exactly as they're told. They take their talents out into the world and double them on the backs of the poor. Who knows how many fields they seize, how many farmers they impoverish, how many families they destroy? It doesn't matter: they fulfill the bottom line. They make a profit. When the master returns and sees what they've accomplished on his behalf, he's thrilled. He invites the two enterprising slaves to enter into his "joy" — the joy of further wealth, further profit, further exploitation.

But the third slave? The third slave in the story opts out. He decides that his master's character is greedy and corrupt, and that he no longer wants to participate in a dishonest system of gain, a system based on oppression and injustice. Knowing full well what it will cost him, the slave buries the heavy talent in the earth. He actually plants it in good and fertile soil. But unlike a seed which multiplies when it is planted, the talent is literally taken it out of circulation.

Is it any surprise that the master abuses and banishes the third slave when he returns from his journey? In Herzog's words, the slave is more than a quiet hero; he is a whistle-blower. At great cost to himself, he exposes the exploitation — the same exploitation he colluded in and benefited from for years. He relinquishes his claim on wealth and comfort, calls out the master's greed and rapacity ("I knew you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed"), and accepts the ostracism and poverty that must follow from his choice.

Debie's son described this parable as a summation of what Christianity is all about. I'm still pondering that possibility along with her. Maybe this isn't a parable about the coming kingdom of God. Maybe this is a parable about the false messiah's that Jesus warned about in the previous chapter which actually introduces the sequence of

parables in Matthew 25 — parable about what faithfulness looks like in hard, hidden places. A parable about our complicity, and the high stakes involved in ending it. A parable about speaking truth to power. A parable about opting out of systems of oppression and exploitation — even and *especially* when we are accustomed to benefiting from such systems. A parable about interrupting "business as usual" for the sake of justice and mercy. A parable about turning reality upside down in the name of love. A parable about saying, "Enough is enough," when it comes to the abuse and marginalization of the world's most vulnerable people. A parable about the rejection, impoverishment, and loneliness we might suffer if we take seriously the call of God. I wonder. I hope you do too.

Perhaps it is no co-incidence that soon after these parables appear in Matthew's gospel, Jesus himself was "cast into the outer darkness" of crucifixion, torment, and death. Like the third slave, he was deemed "worthless" and expendable by the people who wielded power and influence in his day. Like the third slave's costly talent, he was buried in a rock-hewn tomb. And for us, who are waiting for Jesus' return, in the economy of God, there is a profound message of hope. Jesus was indeed planted. And we, as we approach Reign of Christ Sunday, are the harvest. May we find the courage to embody this truth. Amen.

WE RESPOND

OFFERING INVITATION: DOXOLOGY VU 540

Grant us, God, the grace of giving,
with a spirit large and free,
that ourselves and all our living
we may offer faithfully.

DEDICATION OF THE OFFERING

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

THE LORD'S PRAYER (PARAPHRASE) VU# 916

Eternal Spirit,
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and shall be,
Mother and Father of us all,
Loving God in whom is heaven —

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe;
the way of your justice be followed by all peoples on Earth;
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings;
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain out hope and come on Earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us;
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us;
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us;
From trials too great to endure, spare us;
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is Love,
Now and forever.
AMEN

CLOSING HYMN: LIKE A HEALING STREAM MV# 144

Like a healing stream in a barren desert,
Spirit water bringing life to dusty earth,
Good is trickling through our lives as in a dream unfolding,
promising revival and rebirth... like a healing stream.

Like a gentle rain on a thirsty garden,
Spirit water come to nourish tiny seed,
God is bubbling through the soil to coax a new creation,
yearning for an end to want and need... like a gentle rain.

Like a river strong with a restless current,
Spirit water rushing on to distant shore,
God is carving out a channel in a new direction,
calling for an end to hate and war... like a river strong.

Like a mighty sea reaching far horizons,
Spirit water with a love both deep and wide,
God is working in our hearts to shape a new tomorrow:
God will always challenge and provide!

Like a mighty sea,
like a river strong,
like a gentle rain,
like a healing stream.

COMMISSIONING and BLESSING

Go gladly into the world.
Be filled with the love of God.
Dance to the song of the Spirit.
Befriend the Christ in each new day.

Ongoing Stewardship:

There are several different options for you to gift your offering to Lake of Bays Pastoral Charge.

- 1. In person and on the plate. (Each congregation has a different practice around this but you can't miss it!)**
- 2. Via PAR (preauthorized remittance). Then you don't have to think about it again. Money is withdrawn monthly**
- 3. By e-transfer. The email address for donations via e-transfer is lobunitedchurches@gmail.com In the subject line/comment please identify to which of the Churches you wish to donate, Pioneer in Hillside, Stewart in Dwight or Knox in Dorset.**
- 4. By cheque: If you send a cheque, please make it out to Lake of Bays Pastoral Charge and mail it to: LOB United Churches,**