



ADVENT: WAITING WELL
WHILE I'M WAITING – PART 2
MATTHEW 25:31-46
12-20-20

All = bold sections – read together

Leader = regular font – leader reads (choose or rotate leaders)

Sung together = italics

NOTE: Please have a white candle ready to light.

Reflect

Love is always bestowed as a gift - freely, willingly and without expectation. We don't love to be loved; we love to love. -Leo Buscaglia

Welcome

Boker tov (Good morning in Hebrew)! Another Sunday. Another opportunity to corporately identify as the Body of Jesus Christ. Advent waiting is nearly over – five more days and it will be Christmas time! As we continue to focus on waiting – take a moment at the beginning of our time together to assess how you are doing – what is going on in your head? What are you feeling? How rested or tired are you? What has your week and day been like? What are you hoping for? What have you learned about yourself during this time of waiting? Spend a few minutes in silence pondering these questions before saying together our invocation below.

May the love and joy of the Father, the grace and peace of the Son and the courage and comfort of the Holy Spirit be ours in abundance this morning.

Call to Worship – Psalm 34 -- OF DAVID, WHEN HE CHANGED HIS BEHAVIOR BEFORE ABIMELECH, SO THAT HE DROVE HIM OUT, AND HE WENT AWAY

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together! I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.

Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.



The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Check out 1 Samuel 21;13 for the context of this Psalm. It is hinted at in the title given above but the actual event is a bit more graphic. How does this, if at all, affect the way you understand or interact with this Psalm.

“I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be on my lips.” Really?!? What do you think David is saying here? Also, “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” This line is often quoted by the Christian community. What do you think it means and what would that look like in your life?

Song – O Praise The Name -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqBpifDpNKc>

*I cast my mind to Calvary
Where Jesus bled and died for me.
I see His wounds, His hands, His feet.
My Savior on that cursed tree
His body bound and drenched in tears
They laid Him down in Joseph's tomb.
The entrance sealed by heavy stone
Messiah still and all alone
O praise the name of the Lord our God
O praise His name forever more
For endless days we will sing Your praise
Oh Lord, oh Lord our God
Then on the third at break of dawn,
The Son of heaven rose again.
O trampled death where is your sting?
The angels roar for Christ the King
O praise the name of the Lord our God
O praise His name forever more
For endless days we will sing Your praise
Oh Lord, oh Lord our God
He shall return in robes of white,
The blazing Son shall pierce the night.
And I will rise among the saints,
My gaze transfixed on Jesus' face
O praise the name of the Lord our God
O praise His name forever more
For endless days we will sing Your praise
Oh Lord, oh Lord our God*



Oh Lord, oh Lord our God

Advent Candle – Love – Laos

David was 30 years old when he became king of Israel, and he reigned for forty years. Now, David wasn't perfect, but he put his trust in God and served him well. And God blessed King David, and Israel flourished during his reign.

After God had given him success against his enemies, a palace was built for this great King of Israel. When the palace was finished and David was settled in his new home, he called for Nathan the prophet and said, "It is not right that I am living in a palace of cedar, while the house of God remains in a tent."

David wanted to build a temple for God to take the place of the tent that had served as God's home for many years. That night God came to Nathan with a word for David. God would have a temple as David wanted, but it would not be built by David. But that wasn't all that God wanted David to hear that night. God wanted David to hear these words:

This is what the Lord Almighty says; I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, and I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own.

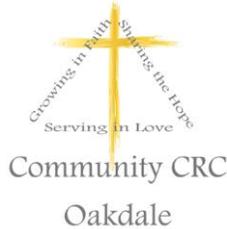
The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you; when your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you. I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

God made a covenant of love with David that day: a covenant in which God promised never to take his love away from David or from his offspring. The line of David would remain on the throne of Israel forever. You see, from the line of King David would come the King of all kings.

This King would save God's people, not just for a time, but forever. God's love is so much more than our own, and we celebrate that today as we remember how he sent his Son, a King in heaven, to earth to be with us. What love!

Jesus of Nazareth said that to be a Christian means to be maltreated for his name's sake (Matthew 5:11) and the apostle Paul said that "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). Mistreatment as a disciple of Jesus is not a matter of *if* but a matter of *when* and a matter of *degree*. Hope is a vital aspect of being a disciple of Jesus. This is especially true under heavy persecution. In America, the land of religious freedom, we have it pretty easy in that there is minimal outright persecution against Christians. **May we make the most of our religious freedom to honor Christ and give credible and coherent witness to him! At the same time, may we be aware of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who don't share the same freedom that we do. The 20th place that is most challenging to be a disciple of Jesus is Laos.**

Of the 7 million people living in Laos, 225,000 are disciples of Jesus. The communist regime tightly controls every aspect of religious life in Laos. Christian gatherings are monitored, and even registered churches are often forced to meet in homes. The government has also passed laws making it difficult to build churches or conduct religious activities. Christians who have converted from the primary



religions – Buddhism and traditional animism – are the most targeted for persecution, as they are viewed as having rejected their families and communities.

Prayer Points: Pray that disciples of Jesus might have the opportunity to witness to their Buddhist neighbors and family members, and that they would be courageous in their being oppressed because of their faith. Pray that Christians in Laos would be able to freely access Bibles and register churches. Pray for the salvation of the communist leaders who try to restrict the church. Pray that Christian children in Buddhist schools would not be discriminated against and given low marks because of their faith.

Jesus is the Light. We are a light. Shine His light!

Song – Come Thou Fount, Come Thou King -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1rXneeti9s>

*Come, Thou Fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing Thy grace
Streams of mercy, never ceasing call for songs of loudest praise
Teach me some melodious sonnet sung by flaming tongues above
Praise the mount, I'm fixed up, on it
Mount of Thy redeeming love*

*I was lost in utter darkness 'til You came and rescued me
I was bound by all my sin when Your love came and set me free
Now my soul can sing a new song, now my heart has found a home
Now Your grace is always with me
And I'll never be alone*

*Come, Thou Fount, come, Thou King; Come, Thou precious Prince of Peace
Hear Your bride, to You we sing, come, Thou Fount of our blessing
Come, Thou Fount, come, Thou King; Come, Thou precious Prince of Peace
Hear Your bride, to You we sing, come, Thou Fount of our blessing*

*O, to grace, how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love
Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it
Seal it for Thy courts a-bove*

*Come, Thou Fount, come, Thou King; Come, Thou precious Prince of Peace
Hear Your bride, to You we sing, come, Thou Fount of our blessing
Come, Thou Fount, come, Thou King; Come, Thou precious Prince of Peace
Hear Your bride, to You we sing, come, Thou Fount of our blessing*

Song – Revelation Song -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsiDukXIeVY>

*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
Holy, holy is He
Sing a new song to Him who sits on
Heaven's mercy seat*

*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
Holy, holy is He*



*Sing a new song to Him who sits on
Heaven's mercy seat*

*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty
Who was and is and is to come
With all creation I sing praise to the King of kings
You are my everything and I will adore You
Clothed in rainbows of living color
Flashes of lightning rolls of thunder
Blessing and honor strength and glory and power be
To You the only wise King*

*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty
Who was and is and is to come
With all creation I sing praise to the King of kings
You are my everything and I will adore You
Filled with wonder awestruck wonder
At the mention of Your name
Jesus Your name is power, breath and living water
Such a marvelous mystery*

*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty
Who was and is and is to come
With all creation I sing praise to the King of kings
You are my everything and I will adore You*

Centering Prayer – The Lord's Prayer

Pray the Lord's prayer slowly and contemplatively. (Matthew 5:9-13)

Offering – Stained Glass Project

The stained-glass window project is an effort that CCRC started in order to replace the old stained-glass windows that are in disrepair. Each window will have a biblical scene in it and will tell of the gospel story of Jesus Christ. The bottom portion of one window is completed and now Wizzi is working on the top portion that will contain a verse related to the scene (the incarnation, or birth of Jesus).

We remember that giving is an act of faith, a practice of hope and an expression of love.

(You can give by sending your offering to the church, P.O. Box 217, Oakdale Ca 95361 or consider giving online through your bank. Our deacons can help you with this if necessary.)

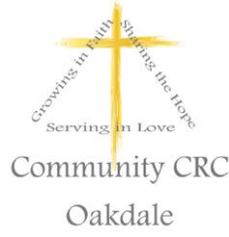
Youth Celebration – **Matthew 19:14**

Take a few minutes to meditate on or discuss amongst yourselves what Jesus was saying to his disciples then and what he is saying to us today.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."

Scripture Reading – Matthew 25:31-46

Last week we ventured further into Jesus' teaching on the Mount of Olives to his disciples about what



they are to be doing while waiting for Jesus to come again. Are we to simply know that he is coming again and go about life with that bit of knowledge constantly in the back of our minds? Are we supposed to be doing anything specific with our lives while we wait? And if so, what does Jesus say that is? We already know from Jesus that he came back in judgment (not bodily) over the Jews in AD 70 with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. He told his disciples then that their generation would witness this – and they did. Jesus then went on to further instruct them that as bad as that was and even though it included a judgement – it wasn't the end times and the final judgment. That would be at a time when people are going about their daily business like everything was normal and fine – just like in the days of Noah when they were eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, working in the field and on the mill. Jesus would come at such a time that it would be like a thief in the night – unannounced and at a time when they were not expecting it – so be ready and alert at all times. Then he became more specific, that not only are they to be prepared like the five wise young women who knew the Bridegroom and took extra oil for their lamps but also getting after it with the abilities and resources that the Master has provided each one of his servants (disciples). What is "it"? Well, it was in that parable – being productive in service to their master. But what does that entail? While not giving us every detail, Jesus makes it clear what he expects his disciples to be busy with when he returns. And that is what we will turn our attention to this morning.

Please read Matthew 25:31-46 at this time.

Gospel Message – While I'm Waiting – Part 2

Live in the light of eternity. That is a phrase a friend of mine used many years ago as the theme for a week of teaching at Hi-Camp. That's ten talks about living well today based on what the future is holding for us. How many of us could fill more than a couple of pages of thoughts and ideas about waiting well now in light of our eternity – let alone ten talks? We often struggle with this because we don't spend much time thinking about eternity – heaven, the life ever after, paradise, the age to come. And when we do, it is often with thoughts and images from Hollywood or Christian fiction books more than direct biblical teachings on it. When we think about the end of the world as we know it now, there are two major things involved. First, there is the fact that a future event is coming that will change everything and brings the divine drama into its final and forever chapter, fully. Second, is how that fact impacts how we are to live and act and think and feel today. The future shapes the present. The future shapes you today.

First, the end. Jesus of Nazareth says there is a definitive time approaching that will arrive like a thief in the night and at a time when we are going about our everyday lives. We won't be looking at our watches/phones and saying, "Oh look, in a couple of hours Jesus of Nazareth is going to arrive and judge the living and the dead. Time to get things in order before he comes." No, the time is now for us to make sure that things are in order and that we are ready for it. That has been the focus of our learning the last few weeks – Jesus is coming...Be ready...Now. Not tomorrow. Not next week. Not next year (alright, next year is only 6 days away but you know what I mean). But now. Jesus describes the scene parabolically. That is, with recognizable images and scenes so that we can grasp and understand the principles and truths they are conveying without it literally being all true (we are not all going to be turned into sheep or goats). The scene is fantastic. The scene pushes us to the edge of our imaginations and then beyond (like much of the book of Revelation). Jesus teaches us that he will come



again to judge, that is, to separate people into two groups – the blessed and the cursed, the sheep and the goats, the ones inheriting the kingdom and the ones inheriting eternal fire, the ones inheriting eternal life and the ones inheriting eternal punishment. Of the 8 billion people on planet earth – all the different nations and tribes, languages and colors of skin, there are only two kinds of people in the end – a sheep or a goat. The truth of Jesus’ statement that you are either for Jesus or against him (Matthew 12:30) is made explicit here. There is no middle/gray/intermediate position. You are either on the pendulum of lostness or off it in the third way, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every person you know and meet and see is either a sheep or a goat. It is really that simple. If Jesus is who he says he is and has accomplished what he says he has accomplished and that he has risen from the dead – life after life after death – then what he says is true and it need not get any more complicated than that. This is why we have focused so hard and intently on Jesus of Nazareth, the Biblical Jesus. It is only when we are for this Jesus and not a Jesus of our own making – a reduced and distorted Jesus that is no Jesus at all, that we are counted as the sheep and not the goats.

I said that this scene is a truth that pushes the limits of our imagination. Think about what is happening here. We are being asked to think about and believe in something that no one has ever experienced except Adam and Eve to a degree before they sinned – the absence of sin and evil (although they has to contend with the Devil). Our lives, all of it and all the time our enmeshed and entangled with sin. Sin taints everything and is why we can only see in this world dimly, even as disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. The great reduction of the Fall into sin has reduced, limited, and to some capacity, ruined everything. While the creation and the heavens declare the glory of God, it does so groaning under the weight of sin. While we can sing and worship and be faithful, we do so in the midst of rebellion and sin and idolatry and disobedience. The pure water we drink and the pure air that we breathe in Christ becomes polluted by our sins. The light that we shine of Christ is dimmed by our disobedience. We mourn. We cry. We are anxious. We are depressed. We are in pain. We fear. We distrust. We are betrayed and betray. We are mean. We are ignorant. We are deceived and we deceive. We are miserable. That is the bad news. The Good News is that all this does not have the final say. The Good News is that in the end, when Jesus comes again all this is gathered together and removed – forever. Now I personally cannot imagine life without the stain of sin completely gone forever, with no impact or bearing on my life whatsoever. Pure joy, pure love, pure kindness, pure relationships, pure delight, pureness through and through. It’s beauty and goodness are beyond me – for now. The future that Jesus of Nazareth is painting is one that is nearly fantastical – bordering on fantasy in that it surpasses our wildest imaginations but it is true – a fantastical reality! This fantastical reality is a glorious truth held by faith for the disciples of Jesus, the sheep that are placed on his right by Jesus of Nazareth. Not you or I.

This is the great and final judgement. And it is coming. But it is not something to be feared or frightened of. On the contrary. As noted above, it is a time of great joy and relief and vindication and excitement for the disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. The sheep will be judged, “blessed.” It will be “well with their soul” on that day. Remember this word from the beginning of our series in Matthew – specifically the beginning of the sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-10)? “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy. Blessed



are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The poor in spirit are blessed not because they are poor in spirit but because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Those that mourn are not blessed because they mourn but because they will be comforted. The meek are blessed not because they are meek but because they will inherit the earth. Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are not blessed because they hunger and thirst after righteousness but because they will be satisfied. The merciful are blessed not because they are merciful but because they will see God. The peacemakers are not blessed because they are peacemakers but because they will be called sons of God. And the persecuted are not blessed because they are persecuted but because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. All these are blessed as an act of loving grace that God bestows on his elect and not because of their works or goodness. That is the Good News – that we are saved and blessed by grace through faith, not because of works so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9) Our "sheep" status at the end is not because we worked hard at acting like a sheep but because by God's grace and love and mercy, we became sheep in Christ. And because we are sheep, we act like sheep. "Sheepness" first and then "sheeping" as a result. Regeneration (being brought back from the deadness of our sins to life in Christ) by the Holy Spirit first, then faith. Grace begets faith and not the other way around. That is, grace precedes faith – always. Grace births new life, new creation, new identity, new citizenship, new practices. From that new life, from that new creation, from that new identity, from that new citizenship new practices that distinguish the sheep from the goats emerge as evidence of being blessed and not the earning of it. This is incredibly important as we listen and learn from Jesus more specifically about the "sheeping" we are to be doing as his disciples today. When we ask the question about what it means to wait well, it means to be ready for Jesus to return and make all things new forever and be doing what he, the Master and Bridegroom wants us to be doing, the "sheeping" if you will. This sheeping, while certainly good works, are not works that saves us but works that are evidence of our being saved.

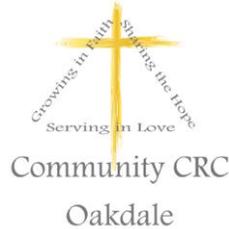
It's also important here to remember and recognize that Jesus is not like a Navy Seal or Marine who is sent by the Commander in Chief Father undercover and in stealth mode to save targets of acquisition and then return back to the base to be successfully done with the mission. No. God is at work today and has been every day in Christ and through the Holy Spirit. Yes, Jesus' saving work of conquering sin and death is done through his incarnation, perfect life of righteous obedience, death, resurrection and ascension. He himself says, "It is finished." However, his work of making all things new (Revelation 21:5) continues until the end when he fully ushers in his kingdom to earth in all its glory and truth. The verb is a present verb indicating his present and ongoing work. God is present and at work in this world right now. The future reality of life in the kingdom of God is active and present today in Christ. It is not purely future. It is present. Through our union with Christ by the Holy Spirit we get experiences, glimpses and tastes of the perfected heavenly life to come. The Psalm that we read just a bit ago tells us to "taste and see that the Lord is good." We get tastes. We get glimpses. We get echoes. We get touches of the life to come today. Our life today is an active participation with Christ by being in Christ to do the will of Christ. This again is the way Jesus' life disciples live. God is not simply out there twiddling his proverbial thumbs, waiting for the day to finally arrive to put a final end to sin and evil forever. No, he is actively reigning right now and is presently active in the creation he is forever united with in Christ – the God Man who is fully human and fully divine, fully Creator and fully creation, fully



infinite and fully finite. Yes. I know. A fantastical reality! It's because of this fantastical reality that disciples gratefully and delightfully are in service to Jesus of Nazareth today.

Notice in verse 34 that the blessed inherit the kingdom just like in the beatitudes and that this was "from the foundation of the world." That is, before you were even born, or your parents and their parents and so on until there was just the earth a kingdom was in the works for you, for us. In other words, this is all part of God's plan from the beginning. This is not a plan b option. Your blessedness in Christ is reality today, as it was known to be then. God loved you and I before we were or are. Isn't that amazing and a fantastical reality too! You and I are a part of God's sovereign plan to be with him forever, in the new heavens and the new earth that has been purified by the removing of all that is contrary to and in opposition of God and his goodness. It also means that you and I are saved by grace, not based on what we have done because we hadn't done anything before the foundation of the earth. Nor is it that God looked ahead and chose us based on what we did for time does not bind God to being a fortune teller magically looking into the future that would be. Instead, scripture paints the picture of a God that is not bound by time but is the Creator of it and Lord over it. From before time, you and I were chosen in time to enter into life beyond time. But let's not overdo this and make out being a Christian as simply thinking the right things. No, it is also doing that which is consistent with that thinking – of being a disciple and not just knowing about being a disciple. It is about being a child of the King and not just knowing about being a child of the King. It is being the servant who is in service to his master because he is a servant who delights in doing the will of the master. And Jesus gives us perhaps one of the most down to earth and practical ways of knowing who this is – doing it to the least of his brothers and sisters (verses 40 and 45 – "brothers" can also be translated as "brothers and sisters" as in Matthew 12:48-50). Now let me say this as clear and precise and unequivocally as I can so that no one hears what I am not saying nor does not hear what I am saying. What I am about to talk about in no way obviates, negates, belittles or lessens our responsibility to love and care for all those in need, all those who are our neighbors and even those who are our enemies. Disciples love indiscriminately. But they do love with a priority.

Jesus is saying here that those on his right, the blessed, the sheep are the ones who have "done it" to the least of these, his brothers and sisters. As alluded to above, Jesus' brothers and sisters are those who are his disciples. He goes on to say in Matthew 12 that it is those who "do the will of my Father in heaven that are my brother and mother and sister." This is confirmed elsewhere. John 12:34-35 says, "I give you (disciple of his) a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." The way the world know that we are disciples of Jesus, children of God, citizens of the kingdom of heaven is by our love for one another across all our cultural differences. In Christ, we become one and give witness to this unity through acts of love and care for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Furthermore, James the brother of Jesus says, "If a brother (in context fellow disciples) or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? (Implied – nothing!). James is using this truth to point out what living faith with works looks like in real life as opposed to dead faith apart from works. Do you hear the echoes of Matthew 25:31-46 in those verses? One more – the apostle John says in 1 John 3:17-18 that is written to Christians, "How does God's love



abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees his brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." Indeed, the whole emphasis of the New Testament (but certainly not the only thing) is for disciples to love one another as Christ has loved us. So, when Jesus mentions the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick and imprisoned it is those who are his disciple that he primarily has in mind.

However, and this is to make my earlier point even more clear, this does not mean that we are to give little or no attention to the poor, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned people in general. By no means. Jesus made it clear with the teaching of the Good Samaritan that we are to be like the Samaritan, offering physical and financial help to those in need that God places in our journey. And his radical teaching that we are to love not just each other (which even non-believers do) but our enemies as well! In a very important passage that we already navigated earlier this year from Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus says that we, as his disciples are not only to love and be hospitable to each other, since even the pagans and tax collectors are doing that to each other, but to be more by extending this same love to even those who hate us, our enemies. God's love is not restricted but freely given. So let us not use these verses in Matthew 25:31-46 either to promote general social justice (they do not teach this) nor give us a false excuse not to extend love and care generally (they do not teach that either). What they do teach is that minimally, those who are blessed by God will strive to love one another by caring for the least of Jesus' brothers and sisters, that is, fellow disciples.

Noticing. The practice of noticing is key to engaging with the least of these as normative acts of love within the normative activities of daily life. Isn't it strange when you buy a new vehicle that all of a sudden you start seeing your same vehicle everywhere! It isn't that the vehicle was nowhere to be found and just started to appear. No, they were always there. Now you are just noticing them. You notice them because you are aware of them and are connected to them differently now. It is more than just another background vehicle driving by – it's the same one you liked and made yours. It's personal. The same is true with loving the least of these. We need to notice by making it personal in at least two ways. First, we must recognize all of us are the least of these spiritually. We were all sick, naked, hungry and thirsty, a stranger and imprisoned. We were sick with original sin, naked and unclothed with unrighteousness and conscious sin, hungry and thirsty for true love and lasting forgiveness, rebellious strangers imprisoned in chains of sin before Christ saved us from all of this by his caring, gracious and merciful love. This humbles us and keeps us from looking down on others or putting them in a category that we relegate to the ignored "background" of our lives as unimportant or unworthy. Seeing us as them personalizes our connection in Christ. We then are able to see and notice them in a way we could not before – they are like us and we are like them. Second, we need to notice that God is already at work in the world and in peoples lives. We are not initiating anything. We are to notice and join in. We are to be aware and engage. We are to be ready and willing to act and co-operate with God. We get to join him. It is not us initiating and then asking God to join in and do something. That is backwards. Remember, grace always comes first and grace is a work of God through and through. We need to pay attention to God's work in others and join in appropriately. Usually that means coming alongside others by listening in love, understanding with compassion and responding not as their saviors (we are not, God is) but as sisters, as brothers, as family.



This is easier said than done. Families on this side of the fantastical reality are messy, dysfunctional, erratic and imperfect. That includes the family of God – the Church. That is meant not to excuse any of her misbehaving’s at all but only to point out that to love well, to wait well, will be at times hard work – the hard labor of love for others. We can be ungrateful, unkind, selfish, stingy, distracted and over-attached to the things of this world to be of any good at caring for the least of these. So, take a deep breath and reset, reorientate, reground yourself in Jesus and his glorious Good News. Slow down daily. Pause often in the midst of your day. Remember the gospel. Remember Jesus of Nazareth. Look around. Observe. Pay attention. See. Notice. Wonder where and how God is working with other people, at church, at work, at school - everywhere. Then connect God’s working in them with his working in you to them, for them – and for you. You are not exempt from the work of God in your life. In fact, connecting with God’s work of love in others is a key way for God to work in us; to shape us and conform us more into the image and likeness of Jesus of Nazareth.

This connecting will not necessarily be in a way that is most comfortable to us. Often the best way of connecting with others is according to their unique makeup – that is, the way they most readily see and receive love. Yes, the tangible of food and drink and clothing and visiting but also the intangibles of where they are at in their faith and under what particular circumstances and within their particular contexts. This means that proximity and not just means is important. We need to be in places where God is working. Of course, that is most definitely the Church and with our brothers and sisters to which we are to make sure we are taking care of those in special need. But it also means other places too – work, school, neighborhood, sports arenas, food pantries, family gatherings, practices, grocery stores, coffee houses, restaurants and more. This is more of a challenge today than it was 9 months ago. Proximity is problematic with the pandemic! Places of gatherings are being restricted and limited. While this certainly does make connecting with others over God’s work in our lives, it most certainly is not insurmountable. It just means we need to be a bit more careful, cautious and compassionate. It also means that these new circumstances under the pandemic have created new conditions for “the least of these.” We will need to be attentive to new opportunities that arise such as those who are shut in and in danger of being disconnected because they are the more vulnerable to virus. Parachurch organization like Oakdale Rescue Mission, Partners Worldwide, Providence World Ministries and many others you may be more familiar with help can also help us connect the Church to God’s work in the world with the vulnerable and marginalized through tangible acts of love, visibly and verbally.

Jesus says profoundly that when you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to him. Now you know why. God is at work in them. God is at work in us and God is at work in the world. This means that God’s work extends to the those outside the Church as well. God’s work is not limited to the Church. We must slow down, reset, notice and see where God is at work in all those who we come into contact with so that we might not miss opportunities to serve him as he works in others, drawing them deeper into vital union with him. This is credible and coherent witness to Jesus of Nazareth and his kingdom already but not fully present here on earth both as a means of witness and as a foretaste of that kingdom to come. Notice and act from a heart that has been made alive in Christ and seeks to utilize the abilities and resources that God has entrusted you to develop and nurture a church that is flourishing as one in Christ; supplying each other’s needs willingly and lovingly knowing that it is not just so-or-so you are engaging with, but so-or-so and Jesus of Nazareth. We have been saved from



serving sin to serving God in order to collaborate (co-labor) with him as responsible (response-able) ambassadors of reconciliation and love today. The Father has sent the Son. The Son has sent the Spirit. The Father, Son and Spirit now send us to one another. Let us be doing so when he returns or to our dying breath.

Communion Meditation

The communion meal (yes, it was a meal – the Passover meal – that was eaten and drunk originally and not small pieces of bread and tiny cups of juice like today) is a meal that declares the Good News of Jesus. It also tangibly displays it as such – a means of satisfying the hungry and the thirsty and as a foretaste of the great banquet feast when heaven comes to earth when Jesus of Nazareth comes again. May this time communion meditation cause us to remember the future we have in Christ. The fantastical reality of heaven on earth without any hindrance of sin or evil. Jesus did this for us. Now we live for him and in being for him, we are also for others as well.

Professing: (Apostles Creed)

**We believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.
We believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
Born of the virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose and ascended to heaven
Where he is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come to judge the living and the dead.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
The communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.**

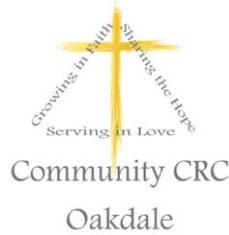
Proclaiming: 1 Corinthians 11:23b-25 (Paraphrased)

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying, “this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” After the meal he took the cup of wine and pouring it out said, “this wine is my blood, a new covenant of grace poured out for the forgiveness of sins.”

Remember and believe that the body & blood of Jesus was given & shed for the forgiveness of sins.

Song – While I’m Waiting -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gjXBMC8-oM>

*I'm waiting
I'm waiting on You Lord and I am hopeful
I'm waiting on You Lord, though it is painful
But patiently I will wait
And I will move ahead, bold and confident
Taking every step in obedience
While I'm waiting, I will serve You
While I'm waiting, I will worship
While I'm waiting, I will not faint
I'll be running the race
Even while I wait*



*I'm waiting
I'm waiting on You Lord and I am peaceful
I'm waiting on You Lord, though it's not easy, no
But faithfully I will wait
Yes, I will wait
And I will move ahead, bold and confident
Taking every step in obedience
While I'm waiting, I will serve You
While I'm waiting, I will worship
While I'm waiting, I will not faint
I'll be running the race
Even while I wait
I will move ahead, bold and confident
I'll be taking every step in obedience, yeah
While I'm waiting, I will serve You
While I'm waiting, I will worship
While I'm waiting, I will not faint
And I will serve You while I'm waiting
I will worship while I'm waiting
I will serve You while I'm waiting
I will worship while I'm waiting
I will serve You while I'm waiting
I will worship while I'm waiting on You Lord
I will serve You while I'm waiting
I will worship while I'm waiting
I will serve You while I'm waiting
I will worship while I'm waiting*

Sending as Disciples of Jesus: Matthew 28:18-20 (Paraphrased)

Matthew 25 has challenged us to serve one another in love – especially those in need within the church. How might you do that this week with someone or some family at CCRC? CCRC also partners with Oakdale Rescue Mission. How might God be calling you to participate in the loving our neighbors as ourselves there or in your neighborhood? May we live a life of “for-ness,” that is characterized by giving of our self, our abilities and our resources to the least of these as we seek to be the church of God, the body of Jesus Christ today, who reigns and is actively working right now in the world he saved, is saving and will ultimately save when he comes again.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus. Therefore, as we are sent into the world by him, let us make disciples of all, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us. And let us remember and treasure that Jesus is with us always, even to the end of the age. Amen!