

LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS PROPER 27A
Twenty-third Sunday After Pentecost - November 8, 2020
The Rt. Rev. Susan B. Haynes

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25

Psalm 78:1-7

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25

This reading from the Hebrew Scriptures reminds us that we have agency in our spiritual lives – we have the power of choice as to whom we will follow and serve. Joshua gathers the Israelites at Shechem and urges them to exercise their power of choice. He reminds them of their ancestors – those who preceded Abraham and how they worshiped idols and other gods. He reminds them that the LORD God called Abraham away to worship Him and to enter into covenant with Him. Joshua offers the Israelites the same choices – they can worship the idols worshiped by their ancestors, they can worship the gods of the Amorites among whom they currently live, or they can worship the LORD. Joshua makes clear that his choice is for the LORD God, the God of Abraham. Joshua exhorts the Israelites that their choice is not to be flippant or casual. God takes worship of Himself seriously. Worship of other gods will have consequences. To turn and follow other gods is to experience the absence of the one true God. The important thing to understand here is this concept of choice. Here is where the Israelites can exert some control over their destiny. They can **choose** to worship God. Or they can choose to be absent from God. ***As for you and your household, whom will you choose? Will you choose God's presence or His absence? In this time of political uncertainty, whom will you serve? Where will you focus your energy of hope and commitment? Do you place your trust in the One who has the power to save the world?***

Psalm 78:1-7

This Psalm highlights the importance of praising God and of passing on the tradition of our faith to our children. If we neglect to teach the faith, then we wind up like the Israelites to whom Joshua spoke, forgetting the consequences of choosing a life worshiping idols vs. a life worshiping the God of Life. Even though worship of God is sometimes shrouded in mystery and is taught only through parable, it should be taught to our children and should not be hidden from them. Teaching children to keep the commandments of God is important as well and is strongly connected to remembering the deeds of the Lord.

How do you model the tradition of faith in your home? What is the place of prayer, of study of Scripture, or praise of God? Do you teach this to your children? Do you share your worship of God with them? Or is it something that is hidden and hard to talk about? Parents, grandparents and other important adults have an obligation to partner with the church to teach the faith to children. What we model as our own choices will not be lost as the children observe us.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Once again we pick up the theme of hope this week as Paul reminds the members of the Church at Thessalonica about the Resurrection. Paul expresses the importance about being well informed about the Resurrection so that when our loved ones die we will not grieve as those who have no hope. Those who have no hope do not look forward to seeing their loved ones again or to living in joy again with them. But those who have hope know that our physical separation is only temporary. Paul outlines exactly what is going to happen: Jesus will cry out a command, an Archangel will call and there will be the sound of a trumpet, God's trumpet. Jesus will descend and those who have died in Him will rise first out of their graves and then all will be gathered in the clouds to return to their Lord.

We live in a death-dealing world, and we are tempted to give in to its anxiety and fear. But we worship a Risen Christ. We do not belong to death or its fear or anxiety. Can you make a commitment at the start of each day to remind yourself that you belong to the Risen Christ and are called to Life and Joy, and not Death and Fear and Darkness?

Matthew 25:1-13

Advent starts in about three weeks. But already we are seeing texts about readiness and preparation, and many of us associate the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins with Advent. We marvel at the foolish virgins who go out with lamps but do not take oil. We are secretly chagrined at what seems like the lack of compassion and a willingness to share on the part of the wise virgins. If we are to receive this parable allegorically, there is something to be said for doing in our own lives what is necessary in order to be prepared. We would not start out on a cross-country road trip with only a quarter of a tank of gas. We would fill up the tank in preparation. Likewise with the foolish virgins – why take a lamp out for the night if you haven't done the necessary preparation of bringing the requisite oil? And later, the bridegroom's knowledge of those who knock on the door seems to be linked to whether or not those who knock are prepared. It would seem that possession of oil is important. And this oil is not something that can necessarily be shared from one person to another but is perhaps unique and special to the person who possesses it. Trimming the wick is important also. One trims a wick to keep the flame clean and bright. An untrimmed wick produces a smoky, less bright light.

What is the oil? What is it that we should carry that keeps us prepared to meet the bridegroom (Jesus)? If Jesus will know us by our preparation, how can we prepare? Perhaps this oil is knowledge of and relationship with Him. Perhaps we keep enough oil in reserve and keep our candle wicks trimmed by being in prayerful relationship with Him. We can't ride on the relationship that others have with Him. We have to develop our own. Do you have a carefully trimmed wick and enough oil in reserve?

COLLECT:

O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he live and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.