

Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, 10:30am

Word for the Week: "I can do all things through the One who gives me strength." Philippians 4:13 (Inclusive Bible)

Worship Info:

- **Worship continues** to be offered **in-person and online**; please make choices that you are comfortable with regarding the COVID-19 virus.
 - **Please note**, heat has not been restored in our sanctuary – please dress warmly.
 - Attached is this week's **in-home worship** package for those who are unable to join us in person or online.
 - Join via **Zoom**, by clicking on this link, or copy and paste it in your browser:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86233774377?pwd=cmF5NkRBVmNqdEEveTBoRTRZbmqpdz09>
 - Enter the following as prompted: **Meeting ID:** 862 3377 4377 **Password:** 029381
 - Join **by phone** at (312) 626-6799 (Chicago), using the same info (charges may apply).
 - Or watch on **Youtube Live!**
 - Go to the linked page, wait for a "Live Now" video - click on it and away you go! Here's the link: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCleukD6raE5lms732qpdDUA>
 - **Share these links** with family and friends! **Visit our Web page & Facebook page!**
 - Please **contact Pastor Kevin** at (217) 692-2543 if you need help connecting.

Tech Note: Liturgist Spotlited and Unmuted/Pastor Muted

Announcements:

Liturgist, Slide 1

- Good Morning! Thank you worshipping for with us today! Here are a few things to be aware of before we get started:
 - First, a reminder to submit Joys and Concerns on the bulletin tear offs to help us record them accurately.
 - Our Ad Council will meet on Tuesday night at 7pm – guests are welcome.
 - Finally, we are not the only nation suffering from the effects of typhoons and Hurricanes, the Philippines have been devastated by two huge storms this year. If you'd like to help, you may designate an offering to IGRC Advance #7020.

Prelude

Pianist

Bell Ringer

Live or? Slide 2

Greeting

Pastor, Slide 3

Good Morning Blue Mound! Welcome to the 24th Sunday after Pentecost! What a great week of weather we've had, although it has since cooled off again. As you can tell, our heating system has _____. One way or another, let's begin with our:

*** Collect Prayer (please rise in body or spirit) Pastor, Slide 4**

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*** Opening Hymn "O Worship the King", UMH 73 Slides 5-9**

L: Please remain standing and refer to the screen or insert for this morning's Call to Worship Psalm 123.

*** Call to Worship: Psalm 123, Insert Liturgist, Slide 10**

Liturgist: ¹ To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!

All: ² As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master,

Liturgist: as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,

All: so our eyes look to the LORD our God, until he has mercy upon us.

Liturgist: ³ Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt.

All: ⁴ Our soul has had more than its fill of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.

*** Gloria Patri: Pianist, Slide 11**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

L: Please be seated and turn to page 472 of your hymnal for our Hymn of Praise

Hymn of Praise "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy", UMH 121 Slides 12-13

Pastoral Reading Judges 4:1-7 Pastor/Liturgist, Slide 14

Pastor: This morning's reading is from Judges 4, verses 1-7, where we'll hear of Israel's rough start, made better through the divine power of God. We'll read from the NRSV.

Liturgist: The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died.

Pastor: ² So the LORD sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-ha-goiim.

Liturgist: ³ Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD for help; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly twenty years.

Pastor: ⁴ At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. ⁵ She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment.

Liturgist: ⁶ She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you, 'Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun.

Pastor: ⁷ I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.'"

Liturgist: The story of God's people for God's people.

All: Thanks be to God. Amen.

L: *Please rise as able and join your voice in affirming our faith through the words of:*

***Affirmation of Faith: Apostles' Creed Liturgist, Slide 15-16**

Liturgist: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I 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. Amen.

Passing of the Peace

Pastor, Slide 17

Pastor: *You may stand if you'd like, but please stay in your seats.* In this time of peace, I offer words from John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to

you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” Peace to you all.

All: Peace to you as well.

Moment of Insight “A Sound Investment” Matthew 25:14-30 Pastor, Slide 18

It took me nearly 20 years to finish my Bachelor’s Degree in Sociology – a long term investment that really paid off in the end, although even as I was taking my final classes, I had no idea where it would take me. But if I hadn’t stuck with it, I wouldn’t have been ready to pursue my master’s when it was time - it really proved to be a sound investment.

This week’s Gospel reading is of the man who entrusted large sums of money to his slaves before leaving town on an extended trip – very large sums of money! We know it as the parable of the talents. You remember, two of the slaves make sound investments and are praised, but that one guy – boy did he mess up! And that is how we remember the story – as a warning: use what God gives you or you’ll be punished.

But what happens if we flip this story over on its head, and make Jesus the one-talent slave? We never consider how the other two made their fortunes – perhaps they invested in ways that made the poor poorer, that kicked people off their property, stealing it, creating homelessness. I’m thinking payday lenders and strong-arm tactics. What if they were simply playing the game the way their master taught them, after all, he is described as a “a harsh man, reaping where [he] did not sow, and gathering where [he] did not scatter seed.” What if the Master’s joy rose from the suffering of others? What if the one-talent guy simply chose not to play by his master’s evil rules? That makes it a much more difficult story, doesn’t it?

“Remember, this story doesn’t begin with “the kingdom of heaven is like…” It begins with “it was as if.” What if this story is *not* about the kingdom we long for, but the kingdom we’ve created, [a growing, destructive monster, that is now] shaping our dreams and running our lives?”¹ What if, instead of pursuing a life in Christ, we are investing in the life of the world?

Jesus, the one-talent man, suffered because he chose not to live a worldly life, but a life dedicated to serving others, not profiting off them, not taking advantage of them. He offered salvation rather than ruin.

¹ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/there-is-now/twenty-fourth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/twenty-fourth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-preaching-notes>

So why does the master in the story get to experience joy? Well, look around us – a lot of folks seem to be having a lot of fun, a lot of joy, and they don't seem to be following a life in Christ. We sound pretty foolish trying to tell them that they have to give all that up to be happy. But there is a better message, which is that there is a higher joy available, the true joy that comes only from a relationship with God.

But here's the trick - we've got to live it if people are going to believe it. If there is no evidence of God's joy in our lives, if it's not leaking and oozing out of us, driving our interactions with the world, then our words won't mean much to those outside, and our invitation won't attract anyone. The joy of the one we follow is different from the joy that surrounds us. Our joy is a joy of simplicity and protection, even of the littlest ones: those who seem the least valued. Now there is a sound investment. Amen?

Scripture Reading

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Slide 19

This morning's scripture reading is from 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, in which Paul depicts the day of the Lord arriving suddenly, I'll read from the NRSV.

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴ But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶ So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷ for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Message:

"Times and Seasons"

Pastor, Slide 19

As I begin this morning's message, please join me in prayer: Lord God, Pour out your Spirit on the words I am about to share, make them your own, find them pleasing, I pray, that they may nourish Your people, O LORD, our rock and our redeemer. Amen

Page 1 - The Issue Today/Intro Story:

Times and Seasons. I have to admit, it feels like we have been through the longest, darkest winter in history, and winter is still to come! I had always wanted to be stationed in Alaska during my time in the Air Force, but I was always concerned about how those long, dark winters would affect me. And I love winter! Well, I love snow. Winter without snow, like here in Southern and Central Illinois, is a complete and total waste of time for me – no wonder most of you don't like winter...

Growing up in Minnesota we had lots of snow, it was a fact of life, and so as kids you lived your lives out *in* the snow – even trick or treating and Easter Egg hunting some years. We lived on a hill, so there was always sliding. There were huge piles of snow left over from the plowing, so snow forts were all the rage, and when my folks bought snowmobiles, a whole new world opened for us! Later, cross-country skiing extended my reach in a more peaceful fashion and developed a muscular figure I had never had before – and would love to get back!

Downhill skiing provided another kind of thrill, and I miss it living here. I love the crisp smell of a sub-zero morning, the brilliance of the sun reflecting off a snow-covered landscape, putting on layers of clothing to make it all the more comfortable, and coming inside at the end of a long day out.

But this winter our nation has been experiencing is nothing like that. It seems hard to find light in all the closures and distancing, light in the numbers we hear on the news each night – if there is light, it only comes in the falseness that COVID really hasn't hit us here – yet. But it seems to be creeping closer. What will a COVID Christmas look like? Or will it just go away? When will we get a vaccine – all unknown.

There is darkness in that unknown. There is a darkness in our own denomination, as plans for a split continue to be made. Funny, most of us don't even think about that much anymore, if at all – that's the power of darkness, it hides darkness. Darkness like the results of this most recent election – some of us finding light in the declared results, some of us declaring that the results have not yet been illuminated. More unknown, more darkness.

What a depressing thought, and I had hoped to preach a more cheerful message this week, something more light and fun. I want to tell a heartwarming story like Marge did – heartwarming and heartbreaking at the same time. I was glad to be sitting behind the TV and pulpit that day so you couldn't see me wipe a couple tears away. But darkness seems to continue as a theme.

Page 2 - Exploring the Text/Context:

But we are not meant to be a people of darkness, are we? That's what makes these times so hard – where is the light that makes life worth the living? According to my Wesley Study Bible, Paul wrote his first letter to a relatively new church in Thessalonica. One that had received the gospel and turned to God, but found themselves suffering for it. Paul's main concern is that despite all the challenges, the community will live in a way that, upon Jesus' royal coming, God will find them blameless [and filled] with grace-enabled practices of self-giving love.²

We heard Paul assure them regarding those who die before Christ returns in last week's Pastoral Reading – remember that? “we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever” (NRSV). And from these words come this morning's scripture.

You've already heard the NRSV so I read from another voice – the Inclusive Bible. “¹But as to specific times and eras, sisters and brothers, you don't need me to tell you anything – ²you know very well that the Day of God is coming like a thief in the night.”

Those might have sounded like urgent words back in the day, but how many of us really believe that it could happen at any time these days? Sure, there are folks out there with their predictions, folks out there working to arrange things so that it **can** and **will** happen soon – as if we can influence God in such things.

² Wesley Study Bible. *Intro to 1 Thessalonians*. 1505

“The concept of the "coming of Christ" (the "day of the Lord") has been the cause of some mischief as well. In some cases, it has been used to scare people into a misguided sense of obedience. In other instances, it has led to a self-serving faith rooted in cheap grace.”³ Throughout history and within our time, not knowing **when** has led people astray: while some are hyper vigilant, others take an easier way out – why worry about it? If Christ is coming soon, why worry about social issues and climate issues, and all the other issues we are faced with, when Jesus will take care of it all.

Really? Is that what we’ve been called to do? Pick up our feet and go for the ride? I don’t think so, “for there will come a moment when we must face God and ourselves honestly. [We must] live joyfully, anticipating the coming of Christ” – whether we believe it will happen now, or in some future time.⁴

To continue in the Inclusive Bible, “⁴But you, sisters and brothers, are not in the dark. The Day of the Lord will not catch you like a thief. ⁵No, you are all children of the light and children of the day. We don’t belong to the darkness or the night.”

Page 3 - The Text Today/Exegesis:

In the next section of the reading, Paul sets up a contrast between "them" and "us" that might sound pretty familiar to anyone paying attention these days:⁵

- We are children of the day; they are children of the night.
- We maintain sobriety; they dull their senses with drunkenness.
- We remain alert; they fall asleep.

It is tempting to focus attention on "them" and their shortcomings. But Paul’s purpose is to focus attention on us and who we claim to be. **If** we are children of the day, **then** we remain alert, keeping our wits about us, because we know that Christ is near at hand.

Paul reminds the church that "you know very well" (which is code for “in case you forgot”) that the day of Christ is coming "like a thief in the night" (5:2). He continues,

³ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4637

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The following contains extensive work from http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4637

“Just when people are saying, ‘At last we have peace and security,’ then destruction will fall on them with the suddenness of labor pains, and there will be no escape.”

Note that phrase "peace and security." It was a slogan on Roman coins to remind people of the source of their peace and security. The allusion would not be missed in Thessalonica, the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia that participated in the cult of the emperor. There are some very deep political ramifications in those words – who do we turn to for peace and security? God or state?

It is also worth pausing on the illustration of the pregnant woman. While the thief in the night is unexpected, the birth pains experienced by the woman have been anticipated for many months. She knows that there is no way to avoid them in order to give birth. While Paul’s focus is on the inevitability of the pain, there is more here: the pain gives way to new life, which may suggest the “obtaining of salvation” (1 Thessalonians 5:9). There is hope for things ahead. There is light in the darkness...

Page 4 - The Good News/Summary/Takeaways:

But let’s be real for a couple more minutes. We are well practiced at skirting responsibility. It’s one of the first things children learn to do (“It wasn’t me!”). As adults, we rationalize with phrases like "I didn’t mean to," "I was just trying to protect you," "the ends justify the means," or "it doesn’t count unless you are caught."

The anticipated "coming of Christ" places before us an earthly, temporal limit: a moment when we will come face-to-face with Christ. There are, of course, other ways that we come face-to-face with Christ: when we encounter the stranger, for example, or when we prayerfully reflect on our lives in confession. But the **coming** of Christ holds us to a time that cannot be put off, when we will be called to accountability, when the labor pains come upon us, when it is revealed where we sought peace and security.

Now, that sounds pretty scary – like the gloom and doom end times stuff that scared me as a kid, and I’ll be honest, put me off of the church for a while. That whole judgement day thing. And lets just admit, all that stuff can be, and is, very scary. It sounds like something I’d just as soon not face. I’d like to deny that it will ever happen. But I can’t. We can’t. So how do we move ahead? How do we turn on the lights that

others can follow (remembering that while darkness only hides darkness, light adds to light!)? How do we do it? Hope.

“Hope is linked explicitly to the death and resurrection of Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:13), with whom we too will be raised (4:15-17). It is also linked to faith and love (1:3; 5:8): that is, to our trust in God and to our service to one another (4:9-10). It is not really possible, Paul seems to say, to speak of one without the others.

Paul instructs the Thessalonians to "put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 5:8). Likening faith, love, and hope to the protective armor worn by Roman soldiers underscores their power. It does more, however. The protective armor signals to others, like a sports jersey, whom the person serves. In the case of a Roman soldier, it is the emperor. In the case of a Jesus follower in Thessalonica, faith, love, and hope identify them as serving the God of Jesus Christ.”⁶

Faith, love, and hope do not protect these Jesus followers from harassment (1 Thessalonians 1:6), but they do, says Paul, protect them from fear of the wrath to come (5:9). [And while] Wrath is not a word that we often associate with the New Testament God, here it is. We can ignore it. Or, we can ask "what would so stir God's indignation that it would reach the level of wrath?"

It's a question worth asking, remembering always that **our** answer may not be the same as God's—particularly if our answer makes **us** feel good. Are we American Christians or Christian Americans? Whose jersey do we wear? That of the Lord, or that of the empire?

Paul closes this section of his letter by saying, “God has destined us not to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Savior Jesus Christ, who died for us so that, whether awake or asleep, we might live together with Christ. So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you're already doing.” Right?

It is time to start getting ready – the times and seasons of Advent and Christmas draw near. Yes, there is that tension between celebrating Christ's first coming and

⁶ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4637

looking toward the second. We want to jump right into the Christmas celebration, but that's not really what it's all about right now, is it. Regardless of that debate, first coming or second, Christmas hymns or Advent, there are things we can do to get ready – we can wear the armor and light the candles of joy, bringing much needed light into a darkened and winter weary world. Amen?

At the conclusion of the message:

Liturgist: As you listen to this morning's offertory, reflect on the worshipful act of giving back to our Lord. Think about what you have received as blessings, and how you can bless others in return. Amen

Stewardship Moment: Please continue to support our mission by mailing your tithes and offerings to the church (PO Box 375, Blue Mound, IL 62513). Thank you.

Offertory

Slide 20

Doxology/Offertory Prayer:

Slide 21

Generous God, your good gifts to us are too many to name! We have been so blessed, not so that we might hide away these blessings, but to use them so that the blessings might be multiplied. As we give from our blessing stockpile, help it to multiply and grow. May our gifts empower multiple acts of mercy and compassion, and may your love pour over this world like a flood. If we have buried these gracious blessing, may today be the day we dig them up and put them to work, so that we might be seen as your faithful servants! Amen. (Matthew 25:14-30)

Joys and Concerns:

Slide 22

(Please forward joys and concerns to Pastor via Zoom Chat function, by phone at 692-2543, or at kdkriesel@gmail.com.)

Prayer Hymn: "Jesus, Keep me Near the Cross" v4, UMH 301

Slide 23-24

Pastoral Prayer

Slide 25

God of covenant, even when we fall into sin, your Spirit invites us to remember that you chose us to be your servant people. Awaken us to the power and gifts you pour into us for the good of creation, and grant that we may be trustworthy in all things, producing abundantly as we work to build your realm.

God of Power and Might, whether you come with a roar of thunder, or as a thief in the night, we pray for your mercy, and thank you for the gift of Your Spirit to guide us in our day to day. Lord, as our nation continues to hunker down in division, help us to find the common

ground of your love. Guide our leaders, both incoming and outgoing, with your wisdom. Humble them with the knowledge that their power comes from you, and you alone, and preserve and protect those who protect and serve us, especially our healthcare workers in this time of rising illness.

God of salvation, who sent your Son to seek out and save what is lost, hear our prayers on behalf of those who are lost in our day, receiving these petitions and thanksgivings with your unending compassion, as with joy we lift up: _____ and with concern: _____,

Joys:

Concerns: Pastor Amanda Richards, Pana (COVID), Peace following the Election

Continuing: Tara Jaukkuri (Surgery on her neck), Dorothy Kriesel (Recovery after Surgery), Brian Damery (Heart Issues), John Holmgren (Heart Issues), Wildfire Victims; Tropical Storm/Hurricane Victims, Dorothy Damery (Health); Maurine Severns (Eyes), Justice in our nation; All affected by COVID 19; Carol Acree, Diane Elder, Doris Bonn, Tom Vaughn, Vic Oxby, Don Younker, Bob Perona, Our Government, Local, State, and National Leaders; First Responders, Members of the Military, Our Bishop (Frank Beard), Our District Superintendent (Brad Watkins), The United Methodist Church.

Those Unable to Join us in Worship: Dorothy Damery (Primrose), Doris Bonn (At Home), Martha Sheppard (Imboden Creek Gardens), Gene Grandfield (At Home), Eleanor Moma (At Home).

As we have proclaimed our joys and concerns let us now take to the Lord those things, which we wish to keep between God and ourselves in a time of silent prayer.

(Silent Prayer)

Redeeming Sustainer, visit your people and pour out your strength and courage upon us, that we may hurry to make you welcome not only in our concern for others, but by serving them generously and faithfully in your name, Jesus, who taught us to pray:

LORD'S PRAYER:

Slide 25

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

***Hymn of Commitment "Rise Up, Ye Saints of God" UMH 576**

Slide 26-28

Benediction - Closing Hymn - Postlude - Community Time

Slide 29