

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost November 8, 2020

“Commitment Sunday”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good Morning everyone. I have to mention - what a difference a day makes! I don't know about you, but I am finally feeling relief that the election is over. I was exhausted at all the ads and propositions constantly bombarding the TV and my email. Not only do we finally have an election decision, but the weather has changed, and it feels like fall, with the fire danger now at a minimum. I call that relief.

So things seem to be wrapping up for 2020, and that also includes our stewardship campaign. I can't say that you were excited it was here, or that you wait with bated breath for the results offering a promise of your time, talent and finances, but today is commitment Sunday. The day our little CTL church asks you to put your money where your mouth is, so we can continue to do the work of spreading the Good News, the Gospel, to those who need to hear that God is there for them, and love will prevail. Also, at this time post-election, I am sure many need to be reminded that God is still there for them and love is still available from family, friends and community as we move forward.

Today's readings are all about wisdom and the need to embrace knowledge. Let's be clear here, the scriptures are not telling us to be “a know-it-all,” or force our knowledge onto others. But instead, it is calling us to have the wisdom to develop and nurture a relationship with God.

In case you haven't already noticed, half of our scripture tells us how to live, and the other half tells us how to have a good death, secure in the hope that we are eternally made from God and will at some point return to God (however you want to imagine that.)

But there is, no doubt, an in-between time. As our bridesmaids in today's Gospel tell us, there is a waiting period, and we must be patient. As with most scripture and parables of Jesus there are many ways to interpret them, and they have often been used to manipulate, or scare people to somehow bring them to faith. As you know, I am not that preacher.

So here I am looking at what could be a very divisive reading with those who go with the bridegroom and those who are left behind unrecognized. But that is not where we are going today. There has been too much division in our world lately, so instead, I am going to discuss this Gospel reading in light of Commitment Sunday, which I believe will serve everyone.

The comparison here is that there are five foolish bridesmaids and five wise ones. Now it is pretty simple to sit in judgment of them both as they are presented here, the foolish left in the dark, and the wise who do not share. Those who are prepared, and those who are lax. But this is a parable, we will not be judging these bridesmaids, but rather looking at the deeper possible meaning to this story. Maybe it is a story about necessary needs and distractions.

In hospice and health care, we are called on a regular basis to continuing education. Some of it is very good, some repetitive year after year, and some that, of course, we could all live without. Interestingly, all our education this year has been online and brought up some new ways of thinking, that I actually never considered.

One particular module was on focused driving and focused care. In order to keep the student engaged the company turned the module into an interesting computer game. In this game they put you in the driver's seat or in the health care worker's position, and

with your mouse, you got to choose a distraction you had no control over and needed to work around, and distractions that were unimportant and should not grab your attention. Literally, the game teaches you the wisdom of what to respond to and what not to. What is necessary and what is not.

I admit, I am getting sick of doing everything on the computer, but this exercise was kind of fun. I would be driving along (on the screen) and a cat would run in front of the car – a distraction I had no control over; along with a stop sign, a railroad crossing etc. In order to be safe, I had to react. But then there were things like the driver’s cell phone ringing, the driver’s coffee cup spilling, or the thoughts in our heads about bills, upcoming dates, and being late. All of these are actually unimportant to the task at hand - which was driving undistracted so that those things you didn’t have control over -that you needed to work around - were clear in your vision.

It was the same for their little example about what is important when visiting a patient. Does the health care worker get distracted by the sports game on the patient’s TV (including the playoffs!), or by the smell of food cooking in the kitchen, or do we focus on the patient and their needs? Why do I mention this silly game? It kind of represents today’s Gospel in a lighter way. The focus of the job at hand in this life is to have a relationship with God. After all, that relationship is going to last longer than your life, right? Eternity. It would be nice if we knew God, here on earth before we are standing face to face, yes? Who wants to die and be face to face with a God, who is a stranger? Even our funeral rites say,

*“After my awaking, he will raise me up and in my body I shall see God, I myself shall see, and my eyes behold him who is my friend and not a stranger.”*

Folks this is the end game, and it takes wisdom in the here and now to get there.

If the oil in the lamps represents the work we do to enrich our spiritual lives in preparation not only for a good death, but for a life filled with love, joy, and gratitude for all God has given to us; then I want to be the wise bridesmaid. How about you?

I want to fill my lamp with love and praise of God, with love of neighbor, in giving to the poor, of sharing the good news that all are created and loved by God. I want a piece, even if it is small, in saving the environment, in bettering humanity, in striving for justice. I want lots of oil that will burn beyond myself and into the next generation.

So you may say, I want that too, but how? CTL may not be a mega church; and we may not have the opportunity to have a food bank that feeds thousands at our door. Right now we don't have the youth in our church that we would like to have, and we can't even worship together right now. But that doesn't mean it will always be this way.

In fact, CTL is still ministering to the poor as you donate to the food bank, and we bring clothes to those in need - we have done so even in the pandemic. We have comforted those who have experienced losses, and loved those who are leaving due to family circumstances so that they know they will remain in our hearts and minds as family. We are learning new technology to bring us into the wider community and spread our love to newcomers. We continue to study scripture, pray and praise God, even though it looks different. We are doing the focused things that give us that first-hand experience of God, that nurtures that relationship. That puts oil in our lamps.

But there are always distractions, right? We would love to give to CTL, we love the programs, but then think, I would like to buy a few more Christmas gifts. Like my health care program, we need wisdom – is this a distraction from the job at hand?

I am stocking up my time, talent, and money for a rainy day, or the future – which may or may not come? Is this a distraction from having a daily, right now relationship with God and your community? Are you not volunteering, or participating because just the right thing has not come up? Is that a distraction? Maybe your idea should be shared with the vestry. Are you not feeling worthy and therefore not part of the CTL family? Is that a distraction? Have you reached out? We are here.

Today's lessons talk about seeking wisdom. Our Gospel asks us what the wise would do while waiting for the Lord. Are you filling your lamp with oil so that you can be a beacon of light for all? CTL offers you some resources, some oil. It may look different this year, but this little church is still doing a lot. We are preparing ourselves and those we meet to experience the love and joy around them; and eventually to see God face-to-face as a friend and not a stranger. Amen.