

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT, 2020

Virtual Grace

Organ Prelude - 1 stanza, "God is Love, and Where True Love is"

Hymnal 1982, #576

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Welcome to Virtual Grace, our experiment at Grace Episcopal Church
in beautiful Honesdale, PA.

I'm Sue Keller, a member of our parish Vestry and soprano in our Choir,
and president of our St. Anne's chapter of the Daughters of the King.

We are reminded that at Bishop Kevin's directive, all parishes in the Diocese
are to remain closed through Easter at the earliest.

Nonetheless we want to stay together as a community of faith,
offering Scripture, a meditation and prayers each week.

Obviously, this is new for all of us -
not going to Church and receiving Holy Communion.

It causes problems, and while we hate to talk finances at anytime,
and at this point, we know finances are difficult for everyone -
including for the Church.

We humbly ask if you are able to do so, to maintain your contributions
to Grace Episcopal Church, through the mail,
or as a couple have discovered,
you can have your bank set up a direct contribution to the Church.

Do remember that even though the doors of the Church are locked,
we are working to see that ministry continues.

Please call Fr. Ed at any time 24/7 with pastoral needs -
prayer concerns *and* thanksgivings,
and if you are comfortable and sense a need,
Fr. Ed is willing and able to make a visit to your home.

We are planning on providing similar broadcasts of short services for
Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter.

Next week we observe Palm Sunday.

In the morning we will place a table outside the main tower of the Church
for those who might like to take a blessed palm branch home.

CONFESSIO

In preparation for our worship, let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor:

God of all mercy, we confess that we have sinned against you,
opposing your will in our lives.
We have denied your goodness in each other,
in ourselves, and in the world you have created.
We repent of the evil that enslaves us, the evil we have done,
and the evil done on our behalf.
Forgive, restore, and strengthen us through our Savior Jesus Christ,
that we may abide in your love and serve only your will. Amen.

May Almighty God in mercy receive our confession of sorrow and of faith, strengthen us in all goodness, ☩ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, keep us in eternal life. Amen.

Holy God, holy and Mighty, holy Immortal One. Have mercy on us. (3x)

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer, p. 219

GOSPEL

Hear now a portion of the Gospel for today from St. John's account:

³¹ The people who were in the house with Mary comforting her followed her when they saw her get up and hurry out. They thought that she was going to the grave to weep there. ³² Mary arrived where Jesus was, and as soon as she saw him, she fell at his feet. "Lord," she said, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died!" ³³ Jesus saw her weeping, and he saw how the people with her were weeping also; his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved. ³⁴ "Where have you buried him?" he asked them. "Come and see, Lord," they answered.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ "See how much he loved him!" the people said.

John 11:31-36

MEDITATION

Gratitude and Caring are themes brought out in this week's book:

volume 5 of The Way of Love, titled, *Bless*,

Things that I wouldn't think of in the topic of Blessing.

But if you start with the gift of gratitude

then our relationships, hospitality and caring fall in place as blessing.

We want to be blessed, we perhaps unknowingly expect to be blessed,

by God ultimately, but more immediately, we want the blessing of others.

We expect to be blessed, and are discouraged, even angry, when we're not.

To be honored, praised, given that raise we've worked so hard for,

the great house, the vacation home, cruises around the world, early retirement -

these are the things the world considers as blessings.

Me, I just want a quiet day, such as I've had this week.

Able to find a silver lining, the best in everything, and in everyone.

Such as snow earlier this week that blanketed the world in cleanliness and beauty;

time to read and reflect;

to be thanked for little things,

like a driving someone to a CT-Scan,

or picking up things at the store for a shut-in,

a phone call from someone I haven't heard from in years, checking on *us* -

when she and her family are closer to the fray in metropolitan NJ.

The author of *Bless* gives a simple suggestion as to how we can easily begin seeing the best in all things and in all people.

It starts with gratitude, and making a list of thanksgivings, she writes:

We can start by writing down one hundred things for we are grateful. At first, we'll find that we write very quickly. Our mind seems to pop with things that make us feel gratitude. Before we are half-way done, however, we'll find ourselves going a little more slowly. The further we go, the deeper we need to dig. Toward the end of the list, we'll be looking for the smallest, most stealthy graces – and they will be there. When we finally complete the list, we will feel both a spiritual weariness and a spiritual rejuvenation...

we begin to find that, rather than being grateful in hindsight, our souls are [in the forefront] for ways to see grace and be grateful. *Bless*, p. 20

But with our blinders on, we keep getting in our own way towards seeing blessings, and then subsequently miss opportunities to be a blessing to others.

That's where making that list comes in.

Self-reflection through our life and in our loves.

Self-reflection is key to gratitude and toward blessing.

Self-reflection to know yourself in order to bless others.

Every seminarian is required to take a term of Clinical Pastoral Education, CPE.

Most often a full summer between the first and second year of classes.

There is an old adage, that CPE, developed in an insane asylum,

was meant to tear you apart and then put you back together - maybe.

I guess I did so well in that summer that I went back following graduation

for a full year's residency in CPE.

Or maybe it was because I needed another year to become empathic.

CPE is honestly designed to help you become better pastors
by learning about yourself, your hot buttons and over-coming them.
The bottom line is that you can't be a blessing to others,
you can't offer God's blessing,
until you've recognized, faced and dealt with your own issues.

That year, I was called to minister to a family - a young Dad dying of cancer,
his wife and a teen.

Mom and Dad conferred with me and assured me they knew what was happening,
and what they wanted, needed to do.

Their faith was strong and they were glad for a Chaplain to walk with them.

Two weeks later, it was time to make the decision.

I went to the room.

Mom was at Dad's side,
teen was standing looking out the window.

Now, my own Dad died when I was 18.

So, of course, I identified with the boy.

I wanted to go over and put my arm around him.

But he was rejecting God,
and would reject any of God's representatives.

I knew my buttons - I had been in that darkened living-room,
when Dad took his last pained breath.

Yet that day, I knew I needed to be bedside with patient and wife
when tubes were pulled.

So, how do you offer a blessing?

To whom must you be a blessing?

And Jesus wept.

The reality of Blessing is in Caring.

and maybe just being in the right place - the correct place.

I could not be with Junior, but I could walk with Dad and Mom in his last moments.

Gratitude leading to Caring,

Caring, from the Latin word, *caritas*, charity.

Our ancient song is:

“Where true love and charity are found, God himself is there.”

Another old hymn came to mind, learned in a country Methodist Church:

¹ Out in the highways and byways of life, Many are weary and sad;
Carry the sunshine where darkness is rife, Making the sorrowing glad.

³ Give as 'twas given to you in your need, Love as the Master loved you;
Be to the helpless a helper indeed, Unto your mission be true.

sing: Make me a blessing, Make me a blessing, Out of my life may Jesus shine;
Make me a blessing, O Savior, I pray, Make me a blessing to someone today.

text: Ira B. Wilson; music: George Stark Schuler

This is not the song of a priest,

it is sung by Evangelicals lay-people standing in the pews.

And yet it is a prayer we all can offer -

an offering of ourselves, “a single, holy, living sacrifice”

when we join ourselves to Christ.

May we somehow, some small way be the assurance of God’s presence.

+ 7 +

And somehow, in some simple way, being grateful for my 100 blessings,
to be one small blessing to someone today.

Start your gratitude list - we have lots of time these weeks.

And may we use each day to God's glory,
and be blessed in blessing.

Amen.

CREED

Let us join as you are able in the Baptismal Creed of our Faith,
offering thanksgiving for what God has done in Creation,
in our Salvation,
in the faith of the Church,
and our hope for resurrected life,
using the words of the Apostles' Creed, saying:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living 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.

PRAYERS

Form II, BCP p. 385

In peace, joy, and humbleness of heart, let us offer our prayers to God:

silence is held for a moment.

Leader: I ask your prayers for God's people throughout the world; for Justin the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael our Presiding Bishop and Kevin our own Bishop; for the Diocesan staff; and for all ministers and people. I ask your prayers for this parish family, and for all who are isolated from their community of faith. Pray for the Church.

I ask your prayers for peace; for goodwill among nations; and for the well-being of all people. Pray for justice and peace.

I ask your prayers for the poor; the sick, especially Dorothy, Thomas, Brandon, Keegan, Jane, Linda and Peter; Luisa; _____ the hungry; the oppressed, and anxious, especially the Shadle family; and those in prison, especially Justin and Mitchell. Pray for those in any need or trouble.

I ask your prayers for all who seek God, or a deeper knowledge of him. Pray that they may find and be found by him.

I ask your prayers for those anticipating death. Pray for the dying.

I ask your prayers for the departed, especially Janet and Douglas, those who have died by violent acts, and complications of the coronavirus. Pray for those who have died.

I ask your thanksgiving for families with whom we live and love; for first responders, health-care workers and all who offer of themselves for the betterment of others. Pray for all for whom you care.

Praise God for those in every generation in whom Christ has been honored especially Lazarus whom we remember today. Pray that we may have grace to glorify Christ in our own day.

And now to sum up all these petitions, let us pray together in the words which Christ himself taught us, saying,

Our Father...

BLESSING

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen. *Ephesians 3:20, 21*

Organ Postlude - 1 stanza of "Make me a Blessing"

text by Ian Wilson, music by George Schuler

The Fifth Sunday in Lent
29 March 2020
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