

Call to Worship: Rev 5:11-14

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!"

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshipped.

Opening Hymn: 211 Take up your cross

Prayer of Confession:

Dear Lord Jesus,
by Your Passion and Resurrection
You brought life to the world.
But the glory of the Resurrection
came only after the sufferings of the Passion.

You laid down Your life willingly
and gave up everything for us.
Your body was broken and fastened to a Cross,
Your clothing became the prize of soldiers,
your blood ebbed slowly but surely away,
and Your Mother was entrusted to the beloved disciple.

Stretched out on the Cross,
deprived of all earthly possessions and human aid,
You cried out to Your Father that the end had come.
You had accomplished the work given You,
and You committed into His hands,
as a perfect gift,
the little life that remained to You.

Lord, teach us to accept all trouble and hardships
after the example You have given.
Let us place our deaths in Yours
and our weakness in Your example of surrender,
Take hold of us with Your love,

that same foolish love that knew no limits,
and let us offer ourselves to the Father
with You so that we may rise with You to eternal life.

Scripture Readings

Hebrews 5:1-10

Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. And no one takes this honour on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was.

In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.” And he says in another place, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Mark 12:37b-13:3

The large crowd listened to him with delight.

As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”

“Do you see all these great buildings?” replied Jesus. “Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

Sermon:

Our text tonight represents the end of the theological battle between Jesus and the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees...our text begins with the delight and laughter of the people still ringing in the air as Jesus begins his final warning and final judgement on the religious establishment. What has just happened has been the final shot of the establishment to try and win a theological argument over Jesus, to try to discredit him in the eyes of the people. They have failed. The last attempt was from the Sadducees who had tried to tie up Jesus with an argument about a woman with 7 husbands, whose husband would she be in heaven? Charlene described the heartlessness of the question extremely well last night. The overwhelming irony of the Sadducees asking this question is that they actually didn't believe in eternal life. There was no heaven where you went to after death. So you see the irony, or maybe the gall of them asking Jesus this question. But Jesus in his answer shows not only an awareness of what heaven would be like but he slides in final scriptural quote that shows up the Sadducees as biblically illiterate. And our text begins with the words “The large crowd listened to him with delight”. They are hanging on his every word. And then he moves into his final critique of the Teachers of the Law and utters a warning that resonates even today. “Watch out for the Teachers of the Law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplace and have the most important seats in the synagogue and the places of honour at banquets. They devour women's houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.” Jesus doesn't mince any words. He's talking about the problem of privilege. And the words of Jesus are as true today as they were 2,000 years ago, in society and in the church, human nature will always attempt to lift itself up in the eyes of others. The problem with privilege is it gets in the way of humility. It's hard to be humble when everyone is bowing in front of you...you begin to believe you are worthy of peoples' respect. I've seen it in others, I've known it in my own heart. It gets in the way of the humbleness that the gospel knows and too often the Church forgets. In Jesus' day apparently it was not unknown for teachers of the law to convey to people that there was no higher duty and privilege than to support a rabbi in comfort. These men then let it be known that such support would entitle the donor themselves to a high place of honour in heaven...and widows could be susceptible to the suave words of a man of power and Pharisees imposed on simple people who could ill afford to support them.

The widow's mite...was the phrase I grew up hearing in my house from time to time. Between the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Women is a gate

named Gate Beautiful. Near this Gate in the Court of the Women were 13 collecting boxes called "The Trumpets". They actually looked like large metal trumpets....if you've ever been on a US turnpike toll both where you throw in the money into a toll catcher you will get the idea. They were for daily offerings to cover the expenses of the daily sacrifices that took place at the Temple. Many people would throw in quite considerable donations. Did I mention they were made of metal? You could tell from the audible ring what coins were being given and see who was giving it. Don't believe me, go to a Mall and drop a dime and then a toonie on the ground near the food court and see who looks up for the sound of which coin. So, anyways this poor widow drops her 2 pennies into the Trumpet and Jesus knows that she has given everything she has. And Jesus says that her tiny contribution is greater than all the others, for they gave from their excess and she gave everything she had. Note that Jesus doesn't disparage the other gifts he just says they are different in their magnitude. To Jesus it isn't the size of the gift, it's the heart of the giver that matters most to God. In the giving of everything she had to God she showed her true devotion and her true sacrifice. I read this story and I think of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus once and said he wanted to follow him. Jesus said, one thing you lack, sell everything you have and give your money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. And the rich young ruler went away grieving because he had great wealth. And then Jesus said, "how hard it will be for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. (Camel through the eye of the needle). And the astonished disciples asked "Well then, who can be saved?" I think of him in comparison to this poor widow who gave her "two cents" to God (a value we still use today to indicate worthlessness) and I wonder how any of us escape this story without an acknowledgment of our own failures in terms of how we give to the Lord. The problem with Jesus is how entirely consistent he is throughout his ministry. Some have said this story is about "reckless giving" for the Lord being honoured, and I don't see that. I think what is being shown here is the wisdom of the widow in realizing that her only hope in life is the providence, the blessing, the promises of God to provide for those who trust in Him alone. She's not giving everything to God out of desperation, she's giving out of love and her total hope in God alone. This widow trusts God with her life for tomorrow and for all time. That is the true and deep message of all of these teachings of Jesus throughout his life and especially in his final week of life...let go of this world....don't listen to its value system...don't let it get it's grip on you....let go of the world and cling to the Lord.

The final message of this theme is found in the disciples' amazement with the Temple itself. Herod (the Great) built a truly magnificent Temple. Without doubt it was one of the wonders of the world rivalling the pyramids for its engineering wonder. It was true majesty and splendor...not just the walls of the

city, but the Temple itself was covered in plates of gold that in the morning sun glowed with fire and was so bright you couldn't look at it. It was this splendour that so impressed the disciples. The Temple seemed to them to be the summit of human art and achievement, and seemed so vast and solid that it would stand for ever. But Jesus made the astonishing statement that the day was coming when not one of these stones would stand upon another. In less than 50 years his prophecy came tragically true.

If Jesus' consistent message to his own disciples was to let go of the world and cling to God the Father alone, what do you imagine his message is for us tonight? His message for us is the same, it is filled with the same warnings about worldly pride and position, it is filled with the same warning about our allegiance to wealth and self security, it is filled with the same warnings about placing our trust in human achievement. And it is filled with one more warning, although subtle, this is the last night that the people will be delighted with Jesus and his words and his teaching. By this time tomorrow he will be betrayed, imprisoned, and soon to be derided by the very people that enjoy his teaching today. The final warning of this text is not to place your trust in the world to stand with you in your hour of need.

But there is a message of hope to us tonight. And that is that Jesus lives out his perfect human life for our sakes. Though we are sinful and distracted by achievement, wealth, privilege and the praises of others, Jesus in our place remains faithful to our Father. And in his willing sacrifice for our sake he offers us freedom from the chains that still bind us. May we be blessed this evening by the truth we know in our hearts that Jesus has overcome every bondage that besets us and in our faith in him he sets us free and empowers us to live out a new life in his name. May the Peace of Christ be with you tonight.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, strengthen us! Strengthen us under the pressure of temptation. Strengthen us when principle is at stake. Strengthen us to do our Father's will. Strengthen us in moments of suffering, in times of loneliness, in periods of depression. Strengthen us that we may never swerve from You, dear Christ, nor weaken through human respect, through a desire to be popular, through hope of social distinction. Strengthen us to accept our crosses and carry them generously to the end. On the battlefield of life, stand by us that we may never turn coward in the ranks. Stand by us that we may not be dazzled by the glitter and glow of the enemy camp.

Lord Jesus, help us this week to remember how you sustained, in body and soul, the will of your Father to redeem the world through your death and

resurrection. Thanking you for standing in our place, setting us free from eternal condemnation, and gaining for us God's grace, righteousness and eternal life. At this time Lord Jesus, in place of our Wednesday evening prayer time hear our prayers for others that we lift before you now.....

Closing Hymn: 220 My song is love unknown

Benediction

Amen