

**Riverside United Church**  
**November 10, 2024**

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 5: 3-12

*New International Version*

<sup>3</sup>“Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup>Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup>Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup>Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup>Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

<sup>8</sup>Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup>Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup>Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup>“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

**Prayer of Illumination:**

God of Life, may the words of my mouth,  
and the meditations of all our minds and hearts,  
lead us to deeper understanding of you,  
and the love you call us to live. Amen.

**“Lest We Forget”**

“To you from failing hands, we throw the torch .. Be yours to hold it high.”

Tonight, some of us will gather on Zoom to discuss the book, Lucy by the Sea by Elizabeth Strout. The book is set in 2020 as the Covid 19 pandemic begins and unfolds. Lucy, the title character, is living in New York and her ex-husband William comprehends what is about to happen quicker than many. He insists that Lucy come with him to live by the sea in a borrowed house on the coast of Maine. The book describes well some of those dynamics of fear, suspicion, denial, uncertainty, isolation of the first few months of the pandemic. Remember? Near the property where they are living, there is a watch tower that was built during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World war on the cliff above the ocean. William goes to visit the tower on his daily walk. One day, Lucy asks how his tower is? and William responds:

“My tower ... built to watch for German submarines, is there as a reminder to me every day of what this world went through, and how it can go through that again. ... This country is in so

much trouble, Lucy. The whole world is. It's like some seizure is taking place around the world, and I'm just saying I think we're headed for real trouble. We are just tearing each other up. I don't know how long our democracy can work." (P.167)

As we gather today, we are still absorbing the reality of the outcome of the election in the United States, and we might wonder with William how long will democracy work to the south of us. When we survey the realities of our world, there are leaders and conflicts that cause us to wonder and worry what real trouble will be the future path.

As we gather today, on the eve of Remembrance Day, we have taken time for an act of remembrance and in that time of silence, I imagine that there are a mixture of thoughts, ideas, memories, and emotions that stir in our minds and souls. There are personal and family stories, there are reflections and questions about sacrifice, there are prayers for peace, etc.

In sharing in the act of Remembrance, we are taking time to wrestle with how we respond to the dynamics of power and evil that have been and are part of our world. We take time to remember horrific realities of war and we pray deeply for peace.

For if we don't take time to remember, we may think that war is a video game.

For if we don't take time to remember, we may dismiss the complexity of conflict and choices for service.

For if we don't take time to remember, we may not recognize if and when history repeats itself.

In 1897, Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem entitled "Recessional for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee." Many of the stanzas end with the words:

Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

The phrase Lest we Forget has become part of our Remembrance vocabulary and maybe the meaning of those words has extra poignancy this year.

A couple of weeks ago, I heard part of the CBC Ideas program on the Rise of Fascism. It was talking about how authoritarian voices for power were rising and spent time describing how some of those forces have been at work in the United States, through groups like the Proud Boys. There has also been a rise in the rhetoric of Christian nationalism in the States, by the Christian right leadership and base - a base once called the Moral Majority - who it baffles me how they have embraced Donald Trump as their means to power. There is lots of resistance to acceptance of difference within the human collective and so all of these forces are disturbing and to use the metaphor from Lucy by the Sea, the memory and the warnings of the watch towers don't seem to have been enough.

I know that I am tempted to despair and wonder have we learned anything from our history.

Have we evolved at all beyond fear of difference and violent responses to conflict?

The torch of memory, of resistance, of truth, of peace continues to need to be received and held high.

Over the past few days, I have seen a variety of responses and thoughts shared on social media, mainly on Facebook, many from colleagues who have offered wisdom about being grounded in

faith, in commitment to be people of peace and service.

In our scripture today, we have heard Jesus' teaching about the holy gift of blessing and how the Holy way is known through gifts and walking and living in the way of righteousness and peace. As we live in our world, we are reminded to seek justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God.

We are also reminded of stories of many who wrestled with the reality of evil in the world and who made choices of response. And those stories are able to inspire. As we live amidst uncertainty and temptation to despair, it is helpful to be reminded of what anchors our lives, or what is our compass as we navigate a path through the confusion.

One of my compasses is that I hold close in my heart the witness and wisdom of my great grandfather who at the age of 42 was killed in World War 1. Before we left for war, he wrote a letter to his eldest son Bordon to be shared with him on his 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. Bordon was/is my grandfather, and that letter is a sacred gift of writing in our family. In the letter, James Howard Tupper, writes about being true: being true to God, to yourself and to your country. I read that letter each year and I continue to absorb the depth of wisdom found within it. He speaks of the agonizing of the choice he made and in the description of what it means to be true to your country, he offers these words that have been a commissioning for me: "It is not always necessary to die for your country to serve her. You can live for her, only do your duty as you see it and you will be fulfilling your obligations."

As we find our compass and reflect on our obligations and our response, we are invited to deepen our sense of being servants and channels of peace, and of hope, and of compassion and love. We need to speak out, and we need to listen - individually and collectively. As a community of faith, we come together to remember and to be renewed to live beyond selfishness and find ways of connection and peace.

One of the pearls of wisdom shared on Facebook are the words from Walter Brueggemann – who was a prominent scholar of scripture, with a particular expertise in the Hebrew prophets. He reminds us, and commissions us:

"The prophetic tasks of the church are to tell the truth in a society that lives an illusion, grieve in a society that practices denial, and express hope in a society that lives in despair."

May it be so. Lest we forget. Amen.