

**WORSHIP SERVICE PLAN****(Traditional & Online Service)**

September 28, 2025 • 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

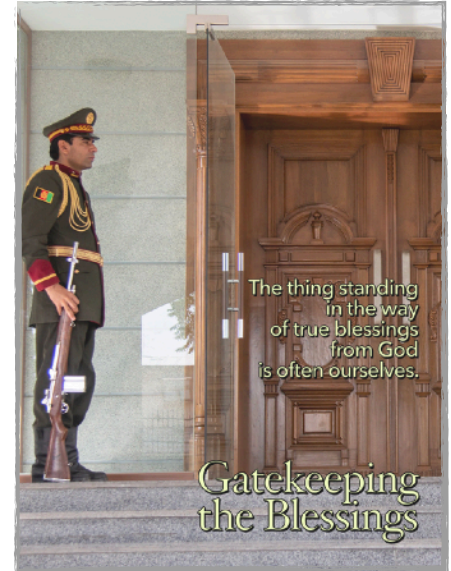
**Luke 16:19-31***"Gatekeeping the Blessings"*

The thing standing in the way of true blessings from God is often ourselves.

**(online only) Preparation for Worship**

Gather these items for worship. If an items unavailable, fret not:

- a piece of white cloth
- an end table or stand
- a plate
- a cup
- a glass or bowl
- a lighter/match
- a padlock and key (or combination lock)
- a computer or internet-accessible device
- a thank you card to God for something this week



For each item you have, thank God for the provision. For each piece you do not have, thank God you don't need it. Place the table/stand in the area you plan to worship. If more than one person will be present, place the table in the middle of where you will be seated. Drape the cloth over it. Arrange the cup, plate, glass of water, and other items on the table. Keep the Bible in front of you. Have enough elements for each person in your household.

**Questions for the announcement loop**

*In preparing for Worship, consider the following:*

- What does it take to convince you to make changes in your life?
- Who is allowed to make changes in your life?
- If you're not hurting anyone or bothering anybody, why should you change anything?
- What do you imagine is something God wants you to change about your life *today*?

**Opening Sentence****Luke 16:31 (CEB)**

Abraham said, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the Prophets, then neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'

**Welcome to this service of Worship, We are glad you are with us! We have a few Community Notes for you to consider as we worship throughout the week...**

**Welcome Visitors!**

We are glad you are here! Our nursery is in the Education Building and our restrooms are in the buildings other than this Sanctuary.

**Reformed, Always Reforming**

This is one of the theological pillars of our particular brand of church. A powerful image from the prophet Jeremiah is of the potter at work, throwing a pot, only for the pot to mess up and have to be remade. God claims to want to do this with us. But what happens when we like our life just the way it is? What happens when we have the deep, if unspoken, conviction that our lives are good as they are? As you move through the week, spend time really digging into the concept that God wants to transform your life. That God wants your life to be different than it is. What does that mean for you?

**Pumpkin Patch Is Coming!**

Starting October 4th (just next weekend!) we will unload a literal truckload of pumpkins and other gourds. Once set up, we will be selling the lots in the hopes of not just raising funds, but also raising awareness of our congregation. You *can* help! You can help unload. You can help run the sale by taking a shift or two (or five). You can post one of signs advertising the sale in your yard. You can make phone calls. Every effort adds up to a lot! You can sign up using the volunteer boards or contact Mandy Ealy for more information.

### Helping with Worship!

The Session in particular (but all of you, really) are challenged to aid more in the leading of worship. This can involve foreground tasks such as reading or singing or praying. It can also involve background tasks such as planning, creating artwork, or putting together liturgy. Let David or anyone on the Spiritual Life Committee know of your interest!

### The Story of Our Church Is Written in Our Connections

Whether we're talking about history or our ever-emerging present, God's goal has always been to connect us with God's Spirit and each other. A big way this happens is through our stories. *Linking*

*Lives* is an opportunity for

folks to share their stories and in so doing help link us together with each other. Over the next 12 months, there will be opportunities for us to learn more about and, most importantly, *pray* for every family in our congregation. We will feature profiles and have times for personal prayer and chatting as well as bi-monthly opportunities for a podcast featuring faith stories (1st week of the month) and/or burning faith questions or theology (3rd week of the month). Invitation letters have already started going out. You can view/listen to the podcasts on our church YouTube channel or from our website.

### The Scouts Are Selling Popcorn!

Our Scouts are in the season for selling popcorn of all kinds of varieties. They are selling at various locations including here in an effort to support their activities.

### Next Sunday is World Communion Sunday!

It is an opportunity to participate knowing that Christians from around the earth will be sharing the symbol of the Table together. In anticipation of the occasion, learn a greeting in another language. Learn how to say it and write and then either speak it or show it next weekend in worship!

### (10am only) Greet one another in Christ!

### (10am only) Introit

"As We Gather" by Mike Fay and Tom Coomes

### (10am only) Prelude:

"Sweet Hour of Prayer" arr. Melody Bober

### The thing standing in the way of true blessings from God is often ourselves.

In this moment, let us stand, take a deep breath, silence our devices, and continue in worship. Let us make use of the Call to Worship that is before you...

### (10am only) Call to Worship

*God's blessings are all around us*

**We receive everything we need**

*God's blessings are throughout our history*

**God has come through for us every time**

*We are meant to be more than just blessing destinations*

**God gives so that we might be blessings ourselves**

### Sing:

"I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" CEL #602

### Prayer of Confession/Preparation

*We come to God so often looking for help, looking for inspiration, looking for resources. And we should! But we often fail to ask God what we should actually DO with the help, inspiration and resources we're given. It's not good that we do that. It's important to talk about our shortcomings so that we're ready to hear what God has to say. Let us begin with silent prayer...*

*(Please pray silently...)*

**Pray: Great God, You tell us to ask for whatever we need. You tell us to lean on you for strength. You tell us to believe in advance in your provision and to be thankful people. You promise us peace for our hearts and healing for our hurts. But you didn't design us to be buckets, Lord. Help us realize the purpose of the blessings in our lives. Help us understand the kind of blessings you expect us to be, that you've prepared us to be. Help us do better about asking your guidance with the blessings**

**we get and the blessings we are. May we come to reflect your generosity as enthusiastically as we receive it. Thank you for listening, God. Amen.**

### **(10am only) Assurance of Pardon**

*God's love can change everything, even the power of our sins over us. And it is God's will that we have this power:*

**In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.**

*The Peace of Christ be with you*

**And also with you.**

### **(10am only) Gloria Patri (Glory to God)**

**Glory be to the Father**

**And to the Son**

**And to the Holy Ghost**

**As it was in the beginning**

**It is now and ever shall be**

**World without end: Amen, amen.**

### **Reading of Scripture**

*Say: When the temptation and tendency to overcomplicate God's will overtakes us, God's Word is given, accessible and ready. By God's Spirit, it can light up even the darkest recesses of our hearts and minds and show us something new. Let us be open to this gift of God and ask for help to understand. Let us pray...(everyone sings)*

**Pray/Sing:** "We've Come This Far by Faith" GTG #656

**We've come this far by faith,  
Leaning on the Lord,  
Trusting in the holy Word;  
God's never failed us yet.**

**O, can't turn around,  
We've come this far by faith.  
We've come this far by faith.**

*Our Scripture lesson comes to us from the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 16, verses 19-31. Listen closely to the Word of God to us all and to our ongoing place in God's story...*

**Read: Luke 16:19-31 (CEB)**

*Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.*

<sup>19</sup> "There was a certain rich man who clothed himself in purple and fine linen, and who feasted luxuriously every day. <sup>20</sup> At his gate lay a certain poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. <sup>21</sup> Lazarus longed to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Instead, dogs would come and lick his sores.

<sup>22</sup> "The poor man died and was carried by angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> While being tormented in the place of the dead, he looked up and saw Abraham at a distance with Lazarus at his side. <sup>24</sup> He shouted, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I'm suffering in this flame.' <sup>25</sup> But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received good things, whereas Lazarus received terrible things. Now Lazarus is being comforted and you are in great pain. <sup>26</sup> Moreover, a great crevasse has been fixed between us and you. Those who wish to cross over from here to you cannot. Neither can anyone cross from there to us.'

<sup>27</sup> "The rich man said, 'Then I beg you, Father, send Lazarus to my father's house. <sup>28</sup> I have five brothers. He needs to warn them so that they don't come to this place of agony.' <sup>29</sup> Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets. They must listen to them.' <sup>30</sup> The rich man said, 'No, Father Abraham! But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will change their hearts and lives.' <sup>31</sup> Abraham said, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the Prophets, then neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'"

*One: For the Word of God in Scripture, for the Word of God among us, for the Word of God within us...*

**All: Thanks be to God!**

### **Children's Sermon**

*Adults, you'll need:*

- a pie or cake to share (with necessary plates and utensils)
- Don't forget to wait for answers "Enough to Go Around"
- Do you know what this is? Yes! It's a pie! And what are you supposed to do with a pie? Well, eat it, of course. So let's see...there's more pie

here than I can all by myself. In fact, if I DO try to eat it all by myself, I'll make myself sick. What should I do?....

- I know: I'll just cut a slice of it and keep the rest for later. Right? How long do you think I can keep it? A month? A year? I mean, what if I just don't feel like eating pie? So, yes, just cut a piece and keep the rest. But if I keep it too long what happens to the pie?...it spoils!
- Goodness, what should I do? I can't eat it all by myself, but I can't keep it too long or it will spoil. God's thinks that we should definitely cut it into pieces and then SHARE the pie. Actually give pieces to others. Sharing is God's solution to enjoying blessings without spoiling.
- So when you're around the people who care about you, ask them about when they share and why.
- Don't forget to pray!

#### (10am only) Anthem:

"Who Will Be a Witness?" Arr. Donald Moore;  
Accompanist: Robert Buxton

#### Sermon: "Gatekeeping the Blessings" *The thing standing in the way of true blessings from God is often ourselves.*

Not that God needs my endorsement at all, but I really love the way **God tells stories**. We get glimpses of not just heaven, but how things are supposed to work, here and now. And with these stories you glimpses of humanity. Not just humanity as God would *like* us to be, but humanity as we are. We can see ourselves in these stories because God *knows* us. It's perhaps the most comforting thing about God's expectations of us: God has us *completely* in view.

So what is it that God sees in us?

God sees our passions. God sees our desires. God sees what we hide and through the layers of masks we might wear. God sees our failings and failures, our victories and celebrations. God sees who we chose to be, who we are, who we are created to be. There's a concept in psychology called the Johari Window. The idea is that there is the part of us we reveal to folks. Then there's the part we hide from folks. There's the part of us that people see that we

can't see for ourselves. And then there's the part of us that no one can see, not ourselves, not others, without help. Yet God can see it all.

So when God tells the story of *the Rich Man and Lazarus*, it is with all of us fully in view.

#### Read: Luke 16:19-31 (CEB) *Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.*

It's the flourishes that really sell it. Understanding the visual cues Jesus employs to really paint the picture. **Purple, the color of royalty**, the status symbol in cloth, showing the true wealth of a person. And he doesn't just eat everyday, **he feasts "luxuriously"**. All of that in contrast to a man who was so poor, hungry and sick **that dogs had pity** on him.

Thing is, this contrast wouldn't have been out of reach for Jesus' hearers. They saw this kind of social/economic disparity everyday. Most prominently among their own leadership. Just like now, **clothes separated the rich from poor**, the powerful from the powerless. The ability to eat when and how you want dividing the wealthy from those who simply were not.

These signs aren't new. We make judgements, moral judgements, on people to this day based on these things. Being poor is considered a condition, like having palsy or smallpox: something to be avoided, corrected, despised. By the same token we see wealth as confirmation, affirmation of the one possessing it. We even ascribe intelligence, moral stature, even virtue to those who know how to exact and possess wealth. This has been going on since the beginning. Even though God provided all they possessed, Cain killed his brother out of jealousy. **Possessions, or the lack thereof, become this weird, universally-accepted barometer for sizing a person up, for determining worth.**

Until faced with our mortality.

While the picture painted in the parable of the hereafter is inexact, imprecise, **the role reversal is unmistakable**. Whatever Lazarus might have suffered in life, he enjoyed sumptuousness beyond



death. The rich man suffered. And, as in life, both men took on these roles in view of each other. Full view of each other.

It makes me wonder if we think at all about the ones we overlook, the ones we ignore in this life. How will we see them later, after? What will we be able to see of each other? When we pass by the one on the exit ramp holding a sign, will we be holding a sign in the hereafter as they pass *us* by?

But it doesn't stop there. In Jesus' story, the rich man *still* can't be bothered to speak to Lazarus. He *presumes* talking to Abraham. We'll talk about that level of entitlement another time.

**But across the gap, the crevasse,** there is no longer any opportunity to tend to another's suffering. The opportunity for that is here, now, in *this* life. So the rich man makes his request for his siblings.

It's at this point that the story takes a turn it's taken me a long time to wrap my mind around. I've read commentaries that think this is foreshadowing the cross and resurrection. And maybe it is. But I think what's being reflected here is good ol' fashioned human nature.

**We already have what we need to understand God's will and plan for our lives, Jesus suggests.**

Sure. Sure. But if someone came back from the dead, then we would REALLY believe and live our lives the way God wants.

Yet God contends: we will NOT be persuaded, even by someone coming back from the dead.

If you're like me, you've had to wonder: how is that *possible*?

The reason is really not all that complicated or strange. **We get in our own way.**

Let's walk through it.

How do we determine ownership? How do we know if someone owns anything in our society, our culture? A deed? A contract? Our name or social

security number on an account somewhere? A receipt? An unspoken or verbal agreement? I think about the folks in the Western North Carolina for whom mudslides and swollen water ways changed how they thought about property. I think about the folks on what was the coast of Indonesia having to change their maps because the tsunami had other ideas. I think about folks in Japan, in California, in Afghanistan for whom earthquakes left them with shaken foundations believed to be settled. Before the Exile, the Israelites thought of the Promised Land as a *certain* thing, like gravity or air, just being there, available. The disciples couldn't conceive of the warning Jesus was trying to give them in advance of the crucifixion. The Romans thought they would be in power forever. The King of England thought he *owned* the colonies. I'm sure the Native Americans who established their burial grounds never imagined Buc-ee's would be sitting on top of them. Still trying to wrap my head around what NCDOT told us: Highway 119 will widen and they will take up a part of our cemetery to do it. All of this to say that possession is a fluid thing when it comes to us as human beings.

But for God, well, it **ALL belongs to God.** And so what we have, all that we might claim to possess, even our abilities, are on loan to us from God. The mistake that the rich man made, that we make, is that he actually thought his wealth belonged to him. He forgot that sharing what he had with Lazarus was a part of his responsibilities, not his privilege. That he wasn't destined to be a blessing bucket. He supposed to be a fountain that God resupplied.

There is a church in Kentucky that has a sizable endowment. The mission of the endowment is "to empower and support ministry projects not ordinarily covered by the church budget." But the governing board of the endowment saw instead that their mission was to "protect and grow the endowment," something not found anywhere in the endowment's charter. So, they ended up saying "No" a lot. One of the board members talked the rest into investing the endowment into several funds profiting from the housing bubble in 2007. A few years later and they were no longer in the position to say "Yes", even if they wanted to.

**The mistake we make**—and, y'all, not just with money, with everything: our physical spaces, our food, our families, our friends, love, hope, even forgiveness—is that we think we are the gatekeepers of the blessings we receive from God's hand. We think that God's grace and goodness and love and abundance needs protecting and preserving. The lessons of Manna get by us.

Hungry, starving even, in the middle of the desert, the people railed against Moses and complained against God. God rained Manna on them and provided quails. The rule, though, was to collect only what was needed for the day or it would spoil. But on the day before the Sabbath, they needed to collect twice as much (as it happens, that batch didn't spoil after a day). Do you know what people did? Some of them tried to save Manna their way anyway. For some reason, we have a hard time allowing God to be in control. Allowing GOD to be the true gatekeeper. When we try to stockpile, cache, or otherwise hedge with God's blessings, we tell God "thanks for the provision, but we don't trust you to give us anymore." It's a demonstration of a lack of faith in the face of God's present abundance.

When all the talk about the rapture supposedly happening this past Tuesday (in case you missed it) ensued, I couldn't help but marvel at how ill-informed some of our siblings in Christ were behaving. First, there was the talk of who gets to go, who would be taken. Then there was the talk about getting ready, even to the point of selling cars and homes (although, what are you supposed to do with the cash in heaven?). Of course, there was the talk about the date and time itself and all the *signs* pointing to the moment. But in all of this naked effort to try and wrest control *from God*, no one considered that God had a handle on heaven *already*. We just needed to focus on being heavenly people. It just doesn't matter when it happens if we're made ready by the way we live our lives.

You see, neither the rich man nor Lazarus could know when their time was coming. It simply came for both of them. Where they landed was a choice made FOR them. The gap, the crevasse was

imposed between them. The banquet table and the fire was set up without their consent. The choice before them was how they chose to live their lives before they died. Someday, maybe we as a humanity will really get this. Maybe we will fulfill and live out what we were made to be. **The thing standing in the way of true blessings from God is often ourselves.** Stop gatekeeping. We need to stop taking it upon ourselves to decide who is deserving of God's blessings. We need to stop worrying about who's going to be occupying God's heaven. We need to put our energy not into receiving blessings (like the televangelists tell us) and focus on actually *being* blessings. The rich man missed his opportunity. My family, let us be sure not to miss ours.

My family in Christ, may it be so. Amen.

### Song of Reflection

"I Love to Tell the Story" GTG #462

### Offering

God chooses to love us, abundantly. We should respond by choosing to be loving, abundantly. This is why we should give and share what we have and who we are. Let us reflect together on what has been given...

### (10am only) Offertory

"Bow the Knee" arr. Tom Fettke; Soloist: Lora Melton

### (10am only) Doxology

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow,  
Praise God all creatures here below.**

**Alleluia, Alleluia!**

**Praise God above ye heavenly hosts;  
Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost.**

**Alleluia, Alleluia!**

**Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!**

### Blessing

(text is for the ONLINE service)

Let there be no doubt, Great God: you love us. And we are grateful. Let there be no doubt, Great God: we should be loving in turn. As we receive the gifts you provide, may the gifts we are meant to be emerge. In the great name of Jesus Christ, we pray this together. Amen.

### Prayers of the People

- Say: The Lord be with you...and also with you. Let us pray...
- *"I Love You, Lord"* CEL#78  
**I love you, Lord, and I lift my voice,  
 To worship you, O my soul, rejoice!  
 Take joy, my King, in what you hear:  
 May it be a sweet, sweet sound in Your ear.**
- Holy God, we are content for you to give but not as keen on you requiring. We are ready for you to bless but not always ready to be blessings. Help us bridge the crevasse, the gap, we have made in our behavior and thinking. Help us make representing your grace and love more a priority in our lives rather than whether we are in or out of your tribe. You've made it clear loving each other is the only ID we need to be your disciples. Help us to trust that better than we do. Help us to live into your will for us and the lives with which you have blessed us. With each breath we take in, let us be determined to speak peace. With each foot we plant on the ground, let us be determined to follow your footsteps. With each time we open and close our hands, let us wield mercy rather than violence, truth rather than gossip, courage rather than apathy.
- We hear these stories and we know you are seeking to challenge us. Thank you for thinking that's possible. Thank you for taking the time to try and teach us and show us. Thank you for believing we are worth redeeming and making the effort to transform. Thank you, Lord, for not giving up on us. Thank you for believing we can yet be the blessings you've empowered us to be.
- Thus, let us be Godly people. Let us make a habit of compassion and consolation. Let us make second nature your grace and mercy and sense of justice. Let us set aside safety and embrace risk-taking with you. May your healing balm reach through us to those around us, especially those on our prayer lists and those we will come to know. Help us love and give love. Help us value mercy as you do. Despite our collective answer of violence, of disdain, of division, of cynicism, to your love, may we truly be washed by you and embrace hope instead...(take time to name your own prayers)

- Thank you for believing in us, Thank you for transforming us. Thank you for teaching us, even how to pray when words fail us, saying,
- **Pray: 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. 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 Sending

(10am) *"O Jesus, I Have Promised"* GTG #724

### Sending & Benediction

*Let us say together our benediction...*

***The thing standing in the way of true blessings from God is often ourselves.***

(raise your hands and say) "Get up, take heart, Jesus is still calling you..."; Go, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guide your hearts and minds this day and forever more. Amen!

**Sing: "May the God Hope Go with Us" GTG #765**  
**May the God of hope go with us everyday,**  
**Filling all our lives with love and joy and peace.**  
**May the God of justice speed us on our way,**  
**Bringing light and hope to every land and race.**

**Praying, let us work for peace;**  
**Singing, share our joy with all;**  
**Working, for a world that's new,**  
**Faithful, when we hear Christ's call**  
**I'm gonna live with the joy down in my heart!**  
**(2X)**

### (10am only) Postlude

*"Praise Him! Praise Him!"* Arr Mark Hayes

---