

## **Order of Service for Zion, May 12, 2019 – Mother’s Day**

**Hymns:** 674 – In the Bulb; 20 – The Steadfast Love of the Lord; 687 - Blessed Assurance; 324 - Great is thy faithfulness

**Scripture:** John 8:31-32; Hebrews 10:23-25; Galatians 5:22-23

**Sermon Title:** Faithful Servants of a Faithful God

### ***John 8:31-32 NLT***

*Jesus said to the people who believed in him, “You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

### ***Hebrews 10:23-25 NIV***

*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

### ***Galatians 5:22-23 NIV***

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

Despite a complete lack of mechanical aptitude, my first summer job was at a place called Universal Radiator, a manufacturer and installer of automotive and industrial cooling systems. My job consisted of pickup and delivery, sweeping the floors, and trying not to break anything. I did manage, on the very first day, to break the truck with which I did pickups and deliveries, so that was unfortunate. But I wasn't a bad sweeper.

The owner was quite a stickler for detail, and a believer in hard work, so when he was around, everything was done and done right. But when he was on vacation – oh boy.

Among the ten employees were his two sons, and they were a wild pair. When the boss left for a week, I noticed an amazing transformation in the shop. Suddenly, work took second place to fun and games. Lunch times stretched to hours. There were impromptu stock car races in the back lot. A cannon was manufactured, for some reason, and fired, which resulted in a visit from the police. I kept my head down and swept, terrified of getting fired, or, worse, fired upon.

When it was announced that the owner was returning a day early, panic ensued, and frantic efforts were made to get the place back into shape, and to hide the

evidence both of what did and didn't happen in his absence. Happily, the news of the early return was just a prank played on the owner's sons by their sister. By the time he actually returned, there was very little evidence of debauchery. I was threatened to secrecy, particularly as regards the visit from the police.

If you're wondering why I tell this story, it is because Jesus tells a couple just like it. Rather than a radiator factory, Jesus talks about a vineyard, a household, a field. But the theme is the same; there are some workers you can't trust when the master's back is turned. They're not dependable. They're not trustworthy. They are not, to use the Biblical word, faithful.

Like the story of the man who put three servants in charge of his wealth while he was away (Matthew 25:14-30). Two servants put the money to work, and doubled the investment. *"Well done, good and faithful servant,"* the Master said to them. The third did nothing. Buried the money in the ground. Didn't even buy a GIC at a miserable 1% return. What did he hear? *"You wicked, lazy servant... Throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

Less familiar is this parable, found in just the chapter before (24:45-51):

*"Who then is the faithful and sensible servant whom his master put in charge of his household to give others their food at the proper time? Well, he is fortunate if his master finds him doing that duty on his return! Believe me, he will promote him to look after all his property. But if he should be a bad servant who says to himself, 'My master takes his time about returning', and should begin to beat his fellow-servants and eat and drink with drunkards, that servant's master will return suddenly and unexpectedly, and will punish him severely and send him off to share the penalty of the unfaithful—to his bitter sorrow and regret!"*

Faithfulness, for Jesus, is all about dependability and trustworthiness – most of all, dependability and trustworthiness when the Master is away. Another way to think of it: Faithfulness is about who you are when nobody is looking.

Let me try to come at this from another angle. When I am speaking with couples who are preparing for marriage, I always ask them this question: "Why are you getting married?" The responses vary, but most fall into the category of, "We love each other very much." One woman took me by surprise with this answer: "I love him, but more importantly, I can count on him. Absolutely. He's the most

dependable person I've ever known. There's nothing more important to me than that." And that's a pretty good definition of faithfulness right there.

Last week we talked about the word "Good," and how seldom that's used in the Bible to describe people. Front to back, with the exception of Jesus, only two people are described as "good." Faithful is a different matter; Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David, Hezekiah, Nehemiah and many righteous women are described as "faithful." Not perfect; not good; but faithful. They were people who made a commitment, and followed through. People God could count on. Because people could count on God.

"Faithful" is one of the favourite Old Testament ways of describing God. Our Call to Worship, our Prayers, even the Offering, all reflected these ascriptions to God's fidelity. *"Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples,"* we said (Psalm 117). *"For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever."* *"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,"* we sang. *"God's mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning; Great is your faithfulness, O Lord."*

Given God's faithfulness, it's not surprising that God is looking for faithful people. It is surprising, though, that as far as the Bible is concerned, being a faithful person isn't only about how much faith we have, but how much faith people can put in us. Our dependability, our trustworthiness, is a reflection of our relationship with God, and a sign to others of the faithfulness of the God we serve. In the same way that "doing good" is a testimony to the world about the goodness of God, our faithfulness is a testimony to God's faithfulness. Further, in the same way that "doing good" is not a precondition of but is instead our response to God's goodness to us, being faithful is our proper response to God's faithfulness, goodness, mercy and grace.

Back to the marriage analogy: when a couple is getting married, they are doing so in response to the love they have for one another. They promise to "have and to hold, for better for worse, richer or poorer, sickness or health." In short, their response to their love for one another is their fidelity – their promise to be faithful. When infidelity strikes a marriage, it is very difficult to overcome, because fidelity is the foundation of the relationship – it is the cornerstone of the commitment.

And "committed" is really another good word for "faithful." Along with "trustworthy" and "dependable," "committed" reflects what faithful is all about. If you're committed to something, you devote your time, your energy, your resources to seeing it through. If you're committed to somebody, you make them your priority; you make your decisions in light of how it will impact them. To be committed to God

is to do the work that God would have us do; it is to dedicate time, energy and resources to the task of sharing the Gospel in word and deed; it is to make our worship of and service to God a priority. The writer of the New Testament letter called “Hebrews” puts it like this (Hebrews 10:23-25 NIV):

*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

“Unswerving” is another good synonym for “Faithful.” And, as the writer points out, “unswerving faith” it is a fitting response to God. And how is this unswerving faithfulness lived out? By, “*spurring one another on toward love and good deeds,*” by, “*not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing,*” but instead, “*by encouraging one another.*” Notice that the writer quite properly links “meeting together” with “encouraging one another.” When we demonstrate our commitment through our participation in worship and other events such as Bible Study, service, and the like, it encourages the other participants as well.

I’ve spoken with lots of visitors after Sunday services, and so many of them tell me how encouraging it is to be at a service with lots of other people in attendance. Unhappily, many churches are not very full these days, and it gives people hope when they visit a happy, vibrant, well-attended church. Your participation in worship helps other people, as they worship together with you.

It’s been said that “90 percent of life is just showing up.” Often times, our “just showing up” makes a big difference to others. So often, grieving families have told me how much it means to them to have people take the time to come to a visitation, or attend a funeral. “Just showing up” can provide some healing in the face of grief. “Just showing up” can be a way to express love and concern, when the right words cannot be found. “Just showing up” is one of the most basic and important ways to show you care.

Commitment is foundational to any healthy relationship. And when we turn to Jesus as Saviour and Lord, we are entering into relationship with him. In response to Jesus’ commitment to us – a commitment of self-sacrificial love which extended all the way to the cross - we are committing ourselves to his service. We are committing ourselves to love one another, and to reach out in love to our world, sharing the love of God in our words and our actions. We are committing ourselves to following his teaching, to walking his path. We are setting our priorities in accordance with the

principles of our faith. We are allocating our resources in the understanding that we are stewards of that entrusted to us by God. We are making good use of our time, setting aside regular hours of worship and service as truly sacred.

It is in living this way that our relationship with Jesus is affirmed, is lived out, and grows strong, able to support us through thick and thin – or, to borrow words of another relationship of commitment, through better or worse, richer or poorer, sickness and health. When you've encountered someone who seems to be rising above the difficulties of their circumstances, whose faith seems strong in the most trying of times, you can be sure that there is a strong commitment behind their strength. They are not overcome by their difficulties; their faith has set them free from the overwhelming nature of their situation.

That's why we read in the Gospel of John (John 8:31-32 NLT): *Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

A faithful relationship – a relationship of dependability, trustworthiness and commitment – is a relationship free of guilt, free of regret, free of anxiety, free of judgement, free of worry – it is a sanctuary in the midst of a storm. It is a truth which, as Jesus said, will set us free. And it is a sign of the strong presence of the Holy Spirit within us – a fruit of the Spirit, together with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control.

How do we cultivate faithfulness? By practicing commitments in all our relationships. By making the effort to be dependable. By ensuring that you are trustworthy – as Jesus says (Matthew 5:37), *"To let your yes be your yes, and your no be your no."* By demonstrating by your priorities what is truly important to you. By *"holding unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful; to spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."*

Faithful. Dependable. Trustworthy. Committed. When I think back to my summer job at Universal Radiator, those were attributes I did not see in abundance. Maybe that's why, when I drove past the place a number of years ago, to show my children where I once worked, the building was still there, but the business wasn't.

Will Zion still be here, for our children, and for theirs? I know that God will do his part – that God will continue to reach out a hand of mercy, of grace, of blessing. I know that God will be faithful. And I know too that if the people of God are faithful

in response, that the work will continue, a sanctuary of faith in the midst of a storm, a light in the darkness, a beacon in the night.

May we commit to being the faithful servants of our faithful God, committed to loving one another, and to reaching out in love to our world; committed to following Jesus' teaching, to walking his path; setting our priorities in accordance with the principles of our faith; allocating our resources not as exploiters but as stewards of that entrusted to us by God; setting aside regular hours of worship and service as truly sacred.

It is by living in this way that our relationship with Jesus is affirmed, is lived out, and grows strong, able to support us through all that life can and will bring, until that day when we, too, might hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Amen.

*Find Us Faithful - Words and Music by Jon Mohr*

*We're pilgrims on the journey Of the narrow road  
And those who've gone before us line the way  
Cheering on the faithful, encouraging the weary  
Their lives a stirring testament to God's sustaining grace*

*Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,  
Let us run the race not only for the prize  
But as those who've gone before us, Let us leave to those behind us  
The heritage of faithfulness Passed on through godly lives*

*After all our hopes and dreams have come and gone  
And our children sift through all we've left behind  
May the clues that they discover And the memories they uncover  
Become the light that leads them To the road we each must find*

*Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful  
May the fire of our devotion light their way  
May the footprints that we leave Lead them to believe  
And the lives we live inspire them to obey  
Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful*