

## Interactive lesson



*pictures from MMMS  
collection*

On top of Mount Soledad in San Diego, there is a monument featuring a giant cross above a great monument to armed services veterans. In yesterday's Veterans Day ceremony there, they commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vietnam War.

What was it like for veterans coming home then? What kind of reception did they get?

What is it like for veterans coming home today? What kind of reception do they get?

How do people welcoming the veterans feel when they see them?

With better understanding of what the veterans sacrificed and how much those who love them missed them, there is great joy upon seeing returning military personnel again, safely home.

Let's take a look now at some of the military people we know or knew, who returned home to us.

Thank you to all who served; we are filled with gratitude for your service and joy to have you with us today!

## Gospel lesson

In these last few weeks of our Christian year, the lectionary turns to Jesus's apocalyptic teaching for the disciples on Mount Olive during the Holy Week.



*picture screencaptured from*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNNmLFQsCDg>

### Matthew 25:1-13

NRSV

<sup>1</sup> "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

<sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

<sup>3</sup> When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them;

<sup>4</sup> but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

<sup>5</sup> As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept.

<sup>6</sup> But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'

<sup>7</sup> Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps.

<sup>8</sup> The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'

<sup>9</sup> But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be

enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.'

<sup>10</sup> And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut.

<sup>11</sup> Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.'

<sup>12</sup> But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.'

<sup>13</sup> Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

*The word of God for the people of God*

<Hymn "Thy Word Is a Lamp">

UMH #601>

## Message: Enter the Gates



ENTER THE GATES  
OUR HYMN OF GRATEFUL PRAISE WORSHIP SERIES

picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/our-hymn-of-grateful-praise/twenty-fourth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/twenty-fourth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Glorious Lord, providing welcome and home for all faithful souls,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and

- abide in our hearts,  
That we may enter Your gates with thanksgiving and  
sing Your praises forever. Amen.

We “Enter the Gates” of our final sermon series for  
this Pentecost season, “Our Hymn of Grateful Praise.”

“Three weeks before the end of the liturgical  
year, and we turn to gratitude as the guiding  
theme for worship. What does a life of gratitude  
look like? Or perhaps more importantly, what does  
it feel like?”



*picture screencaptured  
from Googlemaps 2023;*

[https://www.google.com/maps/@33.2237831,-117.1430843,3a,23y,65.69h,91.08t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sf7FrbUGV7qAZ1h\\_wk0v0iw!2e0!7i16384!8i8192?entry=ttu](https://www.google.com/maps/@33.2237831,-117.1430843,3a,23y,65.69h,91.08t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sf7FrbUGV7qAZ1h_wk0v0iw!2e0!7i16384!8i8192?entry=ttu)

Shortly after I got married, my parents moved to  
Southern California. They moved away from where I  
grew up! I could never go “home” to them again, or so  
I thought.

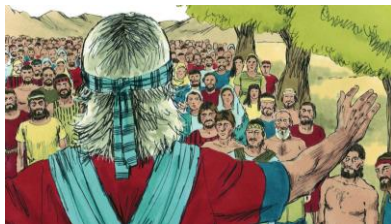
With their open invitation, Keven and I went to visit  
them, not sure exactly where they lived or what the  
environment would be like before we got there. The  
landscape and cuisine were very different from New  
York.

When we arrived at my parents’ new home, we were  
given a very warm welcome (and I do not mean just in  
terms of Southern California weather). Loving hugs

and happy words encompassed us as we entered the door; these were followed up with good food and comfortable quarters.

There was no longer any doubt that [wherever my parents were] was an open home for me. It was clear we were loved and wanted, and I was grateful. I expressed this in continuing to claim them gladly as my parents and maintaining a loving relationship with them, by visiting every other year and keeping in touch through calls and such.

Over the years, my parents expressed frustration and displeasure with my siblings who did not reach out to them, who did not visit or otherwise stay in touch.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/joshua-challenge/>

In the Old Testament, the Israelites had left their home as slaves in Egypt and wandered in the desert for forty years. By then, I think they were wondering if they would ever have a homeland again. After Moses died, Joshua led the people through the conquests needed to re-take ownership of the promised land.

The OT scripture today comes just as they were finally going to settle down in peace. The veterans of God's army had come home at last. It was time for great celebration and a new way of life!

Did you hear what Joshua asked of them at that celebration? A committed relationship to worship God, and only God. To be God's people, we need to center our lives on that relationship, setting aside worldly priorities where they conflict with God's love, and remembering God's holy ways in all that we do.

In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, we hear about people mourning for those who died. In a community anticipating the imminent return of Christ to take them up with Him to heaven, they were sad that their loved ones would not join with them. Paul pointed out that God will restore all believers when Jesus comes.



*picture from MMMS collection*

There is no need for living only in sorrow that things are not as they once were. Many people mourn that things in life, in the church itself even, are not as they once were. Because of the promise of Jesus, we need not continue to mourn what we lack; we can be grateful for what was and that we can move forward from here because we know that God has us and our loved ones in hand.

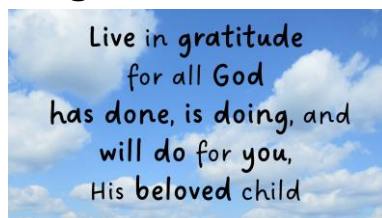
And we do need to live and prepare for the future. Jesus warns His disciples about the suddenness with which our waiting period, our lives, can come to an

end. If we are not focused on God, if we get sidetracked on other things like the foolish bridesmaids got sidetracked on their quest for more oil, we may miss celebrating when Jesus comes to bring us home.

What might that getting sidetracked look like?

- Pursuing monetary wealth instead of the wealth of family and friends.
- Insisting on controlling everything in your sphere until all others' ideas - even those better than your own, or those from God - are excluded from your consideration.
- Putting all our time and effort into bandaging surface needs and ignoring the underlying causes, rather than resolving both.
- Insisting on one's own vision of perfection instead of celebrating what actually is.

I am sure we could come up with a much longer list if we spent time on it, but I am more interested in what does living in love and gratitude for God look like?



*picture from MMMS collection*

- † Putting love and care of people ahead of things (God certainly does).

- † Accepting the gifts of others as they are and cherishing them, celebrating them (God certainly does).
- † Seeking to help everyone be the best person they can be, respecting the directions in which they choose to grow (God certainly does).
- † Letting others help you, that they may feel more valued and fulfilled also (God certainly does). Sometimes accepting help has nothing to do with making your own life easier.
- † Remembering to praise God and give God heartfelt thanks in all things. God certainly blesses us, whether we feel it in the moment or not.

I would love for you to tell me more ways that you have seen and experienced living in love and gratitude for God - perhaps the next time we share God moments, or even at the church conference later today. In the meantime, give thanks for the wisdom of God and the saints who went before us.

Tell others the benefits of living in Christ - we help each other; we share experiences with love; and we develop strong, supportive bonds in Christian community - not to mention eternal life.

Share God's love. The way to get it is to give it to others; if you try to hoard it, you lose out. Be prepared to meet Jesus with joy and love and gratitude by practicing it on others here - that by



the power of the Holy Spirit in our midst, we may one day all enter the gates of our heavenly home!