

Sermon for Proper 27A
Sunday, November 12, 2023
“Share the oil in your lamp”

Text: Matthew 25:1-13

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Once again this morning, we hear Jesus giving us a parable that is also an allegory. Remember, an allegory is a story where the people, places, and events are meant to convey a deeper meaning. Matthew’s Gospel was written after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD for a community of believers who were eagerly awaiting Jesus’s return to usher in the final judgment. The bridesmaids represent the church awaiting the Second Coming; the bridegroom is Christ; the wedding feast is the celebration that awaits when Christ returns for the Church; the delay of the bridegroom is the delay in Christ’s coming that the church was experiencing at that time; his arrival is Christ’s ultimate return; and, the closing of the door is the final judgment. Over 2,000 years have passed since then, and we’re still waiting.

This parable reminds us that we must stay prepared because we don’t know when Jesus will return to usher in the final establishment of the Kingdom of God. It is meant to encourage us to remain faithful in the face of delay. Delay is not a word we take kindly to these days. We don’t like to wait. We want what we want, and we want it now. The normal operation of our modern daily lives does not even make space for delay. When we’re hungry, we Door Dash it. When we’re thirsty, we go to our faucet and we have water immediately. When we need to know something, we have the internet on our cell phones. If we need to get somewhere, we can call Uber. When we need light, we flip a switch, and if we don’t have a switch, many of us have flashlights on our cell phones. We get flustered when we are made to wait for anything, so it’s no wonder that the world has put Jesus on the back burner. We’ve grown tired of waiting for his return and we’re tired of replenishing the oil in our lamps. But we have to stay on our guard. We have to continue work to prepare the world for the kingdom that is to come—eventually. But there is at least one thing we can do to help each other wait.

The gospel today deals with ten bridesmaids who are invited to a wedding and so they set out. They took lamps with them for when it became dark. Five brought oil for their lamps and five did not. Before the bridegroom finally did arrive, the five bridesmaids without oil asked the five with to give them some of theirs, but the five with oil told them to go buy their own. We usually talk about this parable as a lesson in preparedness or a lesson not to put things off. But, what if we looked at this parable from the perspective that half of them had oil and half did not; a portion of them had access to light; and a portion did not.

What if the five bridesmaids who had the oil helped lead the five without into the bridegroom’s house, or what if the bridesmaids who brought oil had led the ones

without by the hand through the bridegroom's house? All of them were among the invited guests of the bridegroom, so presumably they were friends and acquaintances and, perhaps, they had been to the house before. Maybe one of the bridesmaids without oil was more familiar with the house and could help the ones with the light: "I know there's a wall here; here is the door."

While we await the bridegroom, while we wait for God's anointed one, for Christ to return as he promised, we need to help each other in bringing a glimpse of the kingdom of God to the here and now. Those of us who can should be the ones helping out the ones who cannot. We should be helping the world have hope and be more unified, rather than helping further the division that we find in our world. The last time this Gospel text came up in our lectionary, we had just been through a very divisive presidential election. Divisions and tensions were so high then that things erupted the following January. We are dealing with so much division over the state of our communities, our nation, and the world, and we seem to prefer taking sides, rather than looking for unity, looking for what we have in common and what our hopes and dreams are. If we're ever going get out of the mess that we're in, we need to stop refusing to share our oil. We need to stop refusing to talk to each other. And we need to be willing to share whatever God has blessed us with, whether that's money, time, wisdom, kindness, whatever it is, we need to be willing and eager to offer those things to those who are struggling because they don't have those things.

Last week, we renewed our baptismal covenant and we vowed yet again to respect the dignity every human being, which means that we promise to respect our neighbors, as well as our adversaries. That promise that we make at our baptism informs how we conduct ourselves and how we treat each other; we don't degrade each other, we don't belittle each other or point fingers or play the blame game. And having respect for one another also requires that we listen to each other. No matter which side you're on, we all have something to say. If we don't listen to each other, we won't be cognizant of our differences, and we won't recognize and realize how much we are the same. At the end of the day, two people who disagree may want the same thing in life, but may have different ways to get there. The hard work of healing and reconciliation starts with us. The hard work of sharing the oil in our lamps while we wait for the bridegroom starts with us.

Wherever our energy and our passions lie, we can share our the oil in our lamps in every place in our lives: with our families, at our workplace, in our churches, on the streets, everywhere and every day. We need to respect each other and listen to each other and help each other have hope, walk in love, and see where God is indeed working in our lives and in the world. Just because someone has a different opinion doesn't mean they don't have something important to say. Even when someone disagrees with us or makes life choices that wouldn't be our own, they may have some wisdom from

their journey that could help us on ours. Those with oil in the lamp can offer something to those without, and even those without oil may have something to offer the lamp bearers. We have to make the effort.

We continue to await the bridegroom. We continue to wait for Christ to return and we have to be ready for whenever that happens. But in the meanwhile, we must help each other be more like the people he taught us to be the first time he was here, not divided, but working together to bring about the kingdom. We will never get to where need to be unless we share the oil in our lamps. Amen.