

“Give Me Oil in My Lamp”

Matthew 25:1-13

There are just some texts that I wish the editors would have left out of the Bible, this text being one of them. There is so much here that makes me uncomfortable. First, do we really have to say “Wise” Bridesmaids verses “Foolish” Bridesmaids? I know that on occasion, I have forgotten a few things at home, things that I have needed for my job, things that I have needed for my kids, things that I have needed just to make the day go smoother. I have left them all right there, sitting right there on the kitchen counter as I hurried out the door. I’m not sure this type of action makes me foolish but rather hurried or forgetful but foolish....that type of wording doesn’t really sit well with me.

The second thing that bothers me about this text is-didn’t the wise bridesmaids ever learn to share? I thought everyone was taught how to share. I thought that was the whole point of sharing in the first place, to help change our mindsets from scarcity to abundance, to help us realize that even if I share from my little bit of resources, I would still have enough to take of my needs. I thought the whole purpose of sharing was to not stockpile resources so that only a few have everything and the majority has nothing. Isn’t that kind of the basis for the

Kingdom of heaven? Doesn't Jesus talk about sharing? That whole story of the five loaves and fishes comes to mind.

Surely, these supposed "wise" bridesmaids could have shared a bit of their oil. Even my two year old who hates to share, who still hasn't quite gotten the concept of sharing down pat enough that he does it without having me telling him to do so, even my two year old, in fits of kicking and screaming, shares better than these supposed "wise" bridesmaids.

And third and probably, the part that makes me the most uncomfortable and the most unhappy with this text, is that whole door being closed business. Didn't Jesus say knock and the door will be opened unto you? The bridesmaids knocked but then they were told that the bridegroom didn't even know them.

If this parable is supposed to be telling us what the kingdom of heaven is like, then are we suppose to assume that those late to the party, like these "foolish" bridesmaids, are we to assume that they will find the door to heaven locked as well?

This leads to all sorts of questions-what about grace? What about God knowing us as God's own children? Does the closed door to heaven negate all this?

Okay, before I start going a little crazy worrying about all of this and before I starting getting all of us to go a little crazy worrying about all of this, let's take

another look at this parable in its context. Let's look at how does this parable relate to whole of the Gospel of Matthew.

The Gospel of Matthew is the only Gospel that seems to really focus on the last days before Christ comes again. It is a running theme in his Gospel and this theme plays out in his vision for believers. Matthew envisions a world where all believers are living together and there is no real way to tell them apart except for one way. Matthew says we can always tell a true believer from just a follower because the true believer is living out the principles and values of the kingdom of God here on earth now. According to Matthew, The True Believer is someone who is showing others the nature and love of God through our actions and our words. A true believer lives out the quality of life that is described by the Sermon on the Mount. You know that who blessed is the peacemaker, blessed is the humble sort of thing.

For Matthew, that's the difference between being just a follower, being someone who is saying all the right things but not following through in action and being a true believer, being someone who understands that the Kingdom of God calls us to make difficult and unpopular choices sometimes, all because we are called to love our neighbors as God has loved us, all because we are called to seek the grace and peace of God first, and reflect God's grace and peace through our actions and our worlds.

And that is exactly what Matthew is dealing with here in this parable. In his own community, there are people who get the Gospel and are trying to live it out daily and then there are those who are only there because it looks good on a resume, because they think by being a disciple of Christ, it will bring them wealth and power here on earth.

Matthew tells this parable because he wants his community to understand that Kingdom Living is easy in the beginning but it gets harder and harder to live that way as time goes on. It gets harder and harder to live out the principles and values of the Kingdom of God when we realize how much effort is required from us to live the Kingdom way, when we realize that sometimes we will be called to act in difficult situations. Kingdom Living is hard to sustain when we realize that we will be called as disciples of Christ to speak out sometimes even if we are the lone voice. Kingdom Living is hard to sustain because the Kingdom of God doesn't quite fit into the easy way of life here on earth.

Think about it. Think about when we first experienced Christ in our lives. There was this rush, this excitement. We wanted to go out and change the world. But then that whole changing the world was delayed because we soon realized that not everyone felt the same way we did. We realized that not everyone put God first in their lives, that not everyone puts their neighbors first. That whole changing the world thing was delayed because we realized that not everyone wants or is willing

to have the conversation, not everyone is willing to grow in understanding. When that happened, we started to feel like those weeks right after New Year's all over again. You know those weeks, after the initial rush of our New Year's resolutions. The first couple of weeks, it is easy to keep these resolutions. We are excited. We are energized. We are ready to go but as the weeks drag on, soon we realize it is harder and harder to keep that promise to ourselves. Something always comes up. Something always gets in the way. And our energy and excitement starts to wane.

That's is what Matthew is saying here as well. In the beginning, that first moment, when we heard the good news, we experienced God and we were so excited. We were ready to start our Kingdom Living right then and there but then as time goes on, our excitement began to fade. And truth be told, even now, sometimes, it feels like our faith is a little stale. Sometimes, it feels like the Kingdom of God is never going to get here. And it is hard to keep up our excitement. It is hard to keep our promise to God.

Because let's be honest, with each passing day, with each word of sickness and death, it does seem like the Kingdom of God is farther and farther away from being a reality here on earth. With each word of violence and hate in our world, it does seem like the Kingdom of God is farther and farther away from being fully realized here on earth. With each word of hopelessness that fills our world, it does feel like the Kingdom of God is farther and farther away with each passing day

until we find ourselves asking, What's the point? What's the point of keeping awake? What's the point of waiting for Christ's return? What's the point of hoping for that day when God's Kingdom will be realized here on earth and peace will reign? What's the point of waiting? When our faith begins to fade and become stale, we begin asking if Christ is ever going to come back and make things whole again?

In those moments, we need to realize that we are not that much different from Matthew's own community. They were tired of waiting. Jesus was supposed to come back already and make things better. They were losing hope. They were losing faith. And in response to all that, what Matthew wants to remind his community and to remind us today as post-modern people of faith, is that yes, Christ will return. He promised to do so. And yes, the Kingdom of God will be fully realized here on earth. Jesus promised that it would. It is just delayed a bit. It is may not be coming when we expected it to. And Jesus may not be coming back when we expected him to but take heart, he will be here, soon. The Kingdom of God will be realized here on earth soon. It is just delayed for a while. Just keep watching. Just keep waiting. Just keeping hoping.

And in the meantime, we as people of faith, as believers of Jesus Christ, we need to find ways to sustain ourselves in Jesus' absence. We need to find ways to

sustain us, enliven us, enrich us, renew us, both communally and individually. We need to find ways to keep us faithful until he comes.

And that is where the parable comes in.

You see, there is only one difference between the bridesmaids, only one thing sets them apart from being “wise” and “foolish”. All are bridesmaids. All are waiting for the groom. All have lamps. All fall asleep. All have oil in their lamps. There is no physical difference. What sets them apart is the amount of oil they have in supply to keep their lamps burning for the long haul.

Let me explain: You see, The Greek word used here for lamp is related directly to the presence of God. And the Greek word used here for oil is connected to the act of anointing, which once again, becomes a sign of the presence of God. For people of faith, the presence of God consecrates and empowers us. And through God’s presence, we become the light of Christ to the world, the light of Christ for the world.

And We can’t do that, we can’t be that if we run out of oil, if we aren’t connected constantly to the presence of God in our lives and in our world. Without the oil in our lamps, without the presence of God in our lives, we can’t be the light of the world.

So When a person of faith has no oil in the lamp, has no connection to the presence of God in their lives, we run dry. Our light for the world goes out. At which point, we realize we have nothing to give. We can't help others. We can't share God's love and God's grace with others. We can't work to help bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth. At the point with no oil in our lamp, with no connection to the presence of God in our lives, We begin to run on empty. We being to run on fumes.

In order to prevent this from happening, we as people of faith, we have to figure out what fills us up spiritually. We have to figure out what replenishes our oil supply, what replenishes the presence of God in our lives. We have to figure out how to keep enough oil in our lamps to keep being the light of Christ to the world and for the world. We have to make sure we refill our lamps.

Now, here is the kicker to this parable, the part that really makes us uncomfortable, no one can do this for us. We have to do this on our own. We need to become responsible for taking care of ourselves physically, mentally, emotionally, and yes even more importantly spiritually. We must take time to replenish our supply of oil, replenish our supply of the presence of God in our lives so that we can keep shining, keep burning as the light of Christ for this world.

And I will be the first this is not easy to do. We are pulled in so many directions by so many people that there are times when we feel completely drained. Times when We know we have got nothing left to give. In those moments, we wonder how we can become renewed, restored, refreshed, re-connected with God. We wonder how we can refill our lamps.

Now let me stop us all right there and say: Maybe it's time for us to change the conversation. Please don't hear me say that we should not give of ourselves for the sake of others and please don' hear me say that there is anything wrong with feeling depleted. All of us get that way. Even Jesus felt this way during his ministry on earth but when he began to feel this way, what he did was stop and take some time away with his God. He went on retreat. He recharged his spiritual battery. He re-established his connection with the presence of God in his life.

However for most of us, we don't do this when we drained, when we feel depleted. Instead, What we do when we feel this way is try to find a 24 hour convenient store where we can pick up a gallon of milk, and a little presence of God on our way home.

That's not how the Kingdom of God works. That is not how our relationship with God works. the presence of God is not a commodity. It is not something we can pick up on our way home or even borrow from someone until we can make it

to the store. The presence of God in our lives must be cultivated. We must become mindful of our connection with God and find ways to nurture it, sustain it, enrich it. We must claim and give importance to what feeds our souls, what restores our connection with God and make sure we have some of that each and every day. No one can do this hard work for us. These are things we need to discover for ourselves. We must find ways to fill our lamps daily so that we can continue being the light of Christ for the world.

Because here is what Matthew wants his community and us to understand: As people of faith, we may live our lives in this world but we draw life, we draw love, we draw grace, we draw joy from having, from experiencing the presence of God in our lives. And we know that is a connection we should never ever let run dry. We should always find some way, some how to experience the presence of God in our lives each and every day.

Now, I am sure everyone is probably wanting examples or illustrations of how we can replenish our lamps, examples or illustrations of how we can keep the oil in our lamps. But I'm going to tell you. We kind of already know what to do. Jesus kind of told us already how to cultivate the presence of God in our lives when he told us to love our neighbors as God loved us, when he told us to love our God with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, when he told us to take

care of the least of these. We kind of already know what we should do each and every day to keep our light of Christ burning in this world.

Maybe, just maybe it is time for us to reframe the question. Maybe instead of asking: How can we know God in our lives maybe what we really should be asking is How can Christ know us if we have never really gotten to know him? Maybe that's the key to keeping oil in our lamps. Getting to Know Christ by serving through our words and actions. Getting to know Christ while we wait. Getting to know Christ period. Maybe it is time we get to Christ a little better for ourselves in our own lives because no one wants that awkward moment, when Jesus returns and he turns to us and says, "Do I know you?"

Maybe it is time we took the time to replenish our supply of the presence of God in our lives because as people of faith, we are called to keep shining the light of Christ for the world, to the world And we can't do that if we aren't connected with the presence of God in our lives. So maybe it is time for us to figure out what fill us up spiritually so that we may always have oil in our lamps to keep burning, burning for Lord until the break of Day. Amen.