

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A, 11.8.20

Wisdom 6:12-16/1Thessalonians 4:13-18/

Matthew 25:1-13

GIVE ME OIL IN MY LAMP...

KEEP ME BURNING

Today's gospel parable, which is so rich in imagery and so vivid for the imagination, is a good news/bad news story. There are so many unanswered and puzzling questions raised by the story that make it unrealistic and even disturbing: When the maidens go out to meet the bridegroom, where are they waiting? Have they stopped to rest? Do they fall asleep somewhere on the street or at the city gate? Why are the maidens who have extra oil so heartless toward those who have none? Weren't these women friends or related to one another? How does this fit with Jesus' command to love one another? Is it a cruel trick for the wise ones to send the foolish to the merchants, who surely wouldn't be open at midnight? (I mean, they didn't have 7-11s back then.)



Why are the attendants of the groom female? If they were related to the groom, why do they call him 'Lord'? And why doesn't he recognize them? Some scripture scholars argue that it's an allegory and should be understood as such. Little details don't have to make perfect sense. Others posit that the story's a realistic portrayal of ancient Palestinian wedding customs. For

us, we'll just have to accept that it's a bit of both – allegory and historical description.

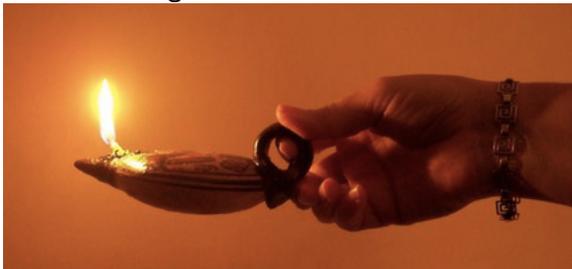
I tried to discover some present-day experience that I could use to relate this parable to our own understanding. And then it dawned on me. A couple weeks ago we had the prediction from PG&E that high winds and low humidity created that "perfect storm" which would force a temporary shut-down of all our electric power – from a Sunday evening at 8:00 pm to Wednesday evening. A few hours later, the warning was reduced to just one day – Sunday night to Monday night. I had horrible memories about last year's power shut-off at around this same time.



Two massive trees on the hillside behind the community center were blown down as parishioners were going to their cars after an 11:30 Mass. Later that Sunday a tennis club facility in Lafayette burned down, some parishioners near Acalanes High School had to evacuate, and a small part of that fire even scorched a section of hillside right next to Highway 24. This was nothing like the massive fires in Paradise or Calistoga or Napa, But it did expose our own vulnerability and our need for vigilance. Last year many of us lost food in our freezers when the power was out. Ace Hardware and Home Depot ran out of generators and lots of other safety supplies.

This time I just prayed that it was a false alarm and that the same inconvenience and potential danger would pass over.... and it did. But what if it hadn't? What if my blasé and devil-may-care attitude backfired? What if the power had gone out and I hadn't bothered to pick up some things I would need at the grocery store or extra batteries for the flashlight or filled a large ice chest to store some perishables for a couple days? Or worse, what if a fire did rage, and I, because of my unpreparedness or apathy, were caught off guard, unsuspecting, inattentive to important matters, or even little details as small as extra oil for the lamp.

Too often we fall into the mindset of the five "foolish" maidens of today's Gospel: We believe that there will always be enough "later" to make our lives what we want them to be and that there's an unlimited amount of "oil" in our lamps to make it all happen. Today's Gospel calls us to see our lives as a wonderful gift from God - but a gift that is preciously short and fragile. Jesus calls us to realize that now is the time to seek the compassion and peace of God for ourselves and for those we love, while our lamps are filled with God's wisdom and grace.



Through his words and his works, Jesus has come among us and has shown us the Father. In Jesus, the kingdom had begun to dawn in our world. Some heard the message and welcomed it; others rejected his message for one reason or another, and thus rejected the kingdom as well. The early

Christians waited for the Lord's coming at any time. After years of waiting, they began to realize his coming would be delayed and they must be about the work of serving the Lord and building the community of the Church. They had to continually fill their lamps with the oil of their relationship with the Lord, a relationship that had to be cultivated over the years of one's life, through experiences both good and bad.

Now, we too know that the Lord comes to be with us in many ways, even as we await his final coming. You husbands and wives know the Lord's presence in the love you share and the mutual support you offer to each other, the patience you extend during this time of pandemic.

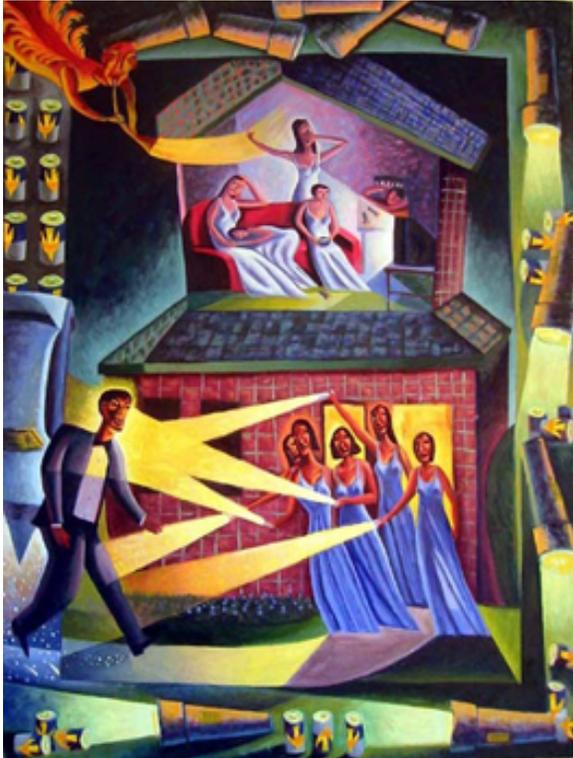


You students know the Lord comes to you when you help a younger brother or sister at home or when a friend does something kind for you. Each of you are filled with the Lord when the right word of advice comes to your lips for someone in need or when an absorbing conversation with a stranger brings to light unexpected insight, or when an old wound is healed after years of struggle.

Every day, if we are attentive and keep vigilant, the Wisdom of God seeks us out and pours fresh oil into our lamps. Some of that oil will come from our faith, hope and love, and the good things life sets before us -- from the wonderful people we encounter and from the successes we've

met. But much of that wisdom will come to us from other sources too, even from ruined weddings. An old country doctor was celebrated for his wisdom. "Dr. Sage," a young man asked, "how did you get so wise?" "Weren't hard," said the doc. "I've got good judgment.

Now, good judgment comes from experience," he continued. "And experience -- well, that comes from having bad judgment." See, even our mistakes and our failures present us with the opportunity to learn and grow. Jonathan Swift once wrote, *"Never be ashamed to own you have been in the wrong, 'tis but saying you are wiser today than you were yesterday."*



In Jesus' day, the wedding feasts in Palestine went on for at least a week. I'd like to think that bridegroom showed a little mercy and let the five foolish bridesmaids in at least by the second or third day of the party. After all, they paid a lot for those dresses and the hairdos, even if they did overlook the oil for their lamps. Next time

they'll be sensible. May we too be sensible enough to appreciate the preciousness of the time we have been given by God in this life and make the most of it, filling our lamps with compassion, mercy and justice as we await the bridegroom's arrival, the coming of Our Lord.



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