

A Parable Of Judgement

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[0 : 00] Our Father, on this Thanksgiving Day, when we thank you particularly for all the bounty in the midst of which we have been given to live our lives, we do pray that you will lift from us the gloom and the despair and the depression and discouragement which many of the circumstances of our world tend to thrust upon us, and that you will gladden our hearts that we may appropriately give thanks to you for all the mercies and the evidences of your love in the midst of which you've called us to live our lives.

In Christ's name, Amen. I'm grateful to those who have prepared the church for this harvest Thanksgiving with all the decorations that are there.

I must say that in my first year in British Columbia, this is the first time that I knew that they grew bananas in British Columbia. But I'm grateful nevertheless to know that everything works so well. Can you turn to Matthew chapter 25? And I'm skipping a little this morning because I want to share with you this parable which comes at the beginning of Matthew chapter 25.

And it's a parable about ten young ladies. It's one of the parables of the kingdom with which the gospel of Matthew abounds.

[1 : 35] Magnificent pictures that deserve our contemplation. Chapter 25, verse 1, page 26 in the New Testament section of your church Bible.

Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise.

Five of them were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them. But the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

But at midnight there was a cry, Behold, the bridegroom comes, come out to meet him. Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps.

And the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.

[2 : 42] But the wise replied, Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you. Go rather to the dealer and buy for yourselves. Go rather to the bridegroom.

When the couple contracted together to proceed. And that took place some months probably before the marriage feast, which is spoken of here.

The second stage was the betrothal. And that was when the family of the bride and the family of the groom came together. And they exchanged gifts and showed that their intentions were honorable towards their respective daughter-in-law and son-in-law.

And those gifts were exchanged between the bride and the groom, between the bride's family and the groom's family. And then some months later, the marriage itself took place.

And this was when the bridegroom would go around and visit all his old haunts, say goodbye to all his single life, and finally, late in the night, come to the home of the bride to claim her and to lead her away to her house amidst much festivity.

[4 : 23] And a procession would wind itself through the streets of the village, and everybody would gather for the wedding. And the ten ladies who were here involved were the attendants of the bride.

And they waited with the bride for that rather long time that it took the bridegroom to go and say goodbye to all his cronies and visit all his friends before he came to claim his bride.

And so in the course of that long wait, the bridesmaids fell asleep. And their lamps went flickering on.

And when at last they were aroused from their sleep by the sign of the bridegroom's procession coming through the village, he's coming, and they all woke up, and they all sort of straightened themselves up and went to the business of attending to their wee lamp in order that they might take

part in the procession.

And some discovered that because they had not anticipated the delay, they didn't have the oil for their lamps. And so they thought, well, I'll just borrow it from somebody else.

[5 : 36] But the people they went to borrow it from said, I'm sorry, we've only got just enough for ourselves. You'll have to go to the dealer and get some oil for yourself.

And so at the very moment when they were called upon to enter into the celebration and to take their part in it, they found themselves going through the darkened streets of the village without any lamp in order to try and rouse some oil merchant from his sleep in order that they could get the fresh supply of oil.

And by the time they'd found one, got him out of bed, got what they needed, found the bridal party again. The party had proceeded so far that the doors were all locked and nobody else was coming in, and they found themselves outside the kingdom.

It's a parable of judgment. There are several things that I want us to look at about it because it's the picture also of the church.

And the first thing I want you to notice is that in the church, people get tired and go to sleep. Now, I'm not advocating just this moment for that, but there are times when people get tired.

[7 : 05] Congregations get tired. And the process has gone on so long, and the thing that they were expecting and the thing they were waiting for hasn't happened, so what are you going to do?

And it comes out like this, you know, that I've walked all the dishes I want to wash. I've taken part in all the stewardship campaigns I want to take part in, and I'm tired.

I've visited all the neighbors I want to visit on behalf of paying off the church's debts. I've served on all the committees and submitted to all the bickering that anybody should have to put up with in a lifetime, and I'm tired.

I've taught all the Sunday school classes of recalcitrant, disobedient, badly brought up children that belong to somebody else that I want to teach, and I'm tired.

And I've done all the serving at tables and polishing brass and arranging flowers and cleaning carpets and all those things.

[8 : 10] I've had it, and I'm tired. And so you get a whole congregation that's tired, and they go to sleep. And what do you do?

Because once you're asleep, you forget that there is a crisis coming. Now the word crisis in New Testament Greek is a word of judgment.

And all of us have crises in our lives. The crisis in this lovely little story comes at midnight, when all the bridegrooms, our bridesmaids have gone to sleep, and suddenly you can see the bridegroom's procession coming through the streets to claim his bride, and a shout goes out, and everybody wakes up.

But some of them find that they're not ready any longer. That in all their activity, in all their preparation, they're not ready for this moment of crisis which comes for them.

And it may come for them as persons, and it may come for them as a parent, but they're just not ready for it. They haven't got oil in their lamps.

[9 : 23] So they suspect that they can go around and borrow it, and they see somebody else in the community, and they say, well, you've got oil for your lamp. Lend me some of your oil.

And they have to say to you, I'm sorry, you can't have any of mine, but you can go to where I got mine from, and there'll be some there for you too. And that, you see, is part of the problem of belonging to a church.

You may think a church is the place where people can share what they have, but that's not the whole thing. The church is the place where everybody has got to find their own source of oil.

You can't lean on somebody else. You can't depend on somebody else. When the crisis comes, when the crunch is there, you have got to have found your own source of supply.

And if you haven't found your own source of supply, then something has radically gone wrong with your understanding. You see, what I think happens is that a lot of people tend to regard the church as a kind of bottomless pit into which you are required for certain mysterious and religious reasons to contribute your time and your money and your best efforts and your good intentions, and you can throw them all in there, and ultimately, all they ask for when you've done all that is more.

[11 : 10] And people get tired of that. But you see, what this parable is to tell you is that at the heart of the life of the Christian community, at the heart of the kingdom, is not a bottomless pit, but a

source of supply.

A dealer. And this dealer can supply to you free of charge, that which you need more than anything else.

The oil which is the oil of the Holy Spirit. The function, the primary reality of the Christian community is that there is something for you to claim personally, something that belongs to you, something that belongs to your life, something that you need in order to enter into the celebration, the joyous activity which is planned for you as a child of God.

You've got to go to the source of supply and find it for yourself. Nobody else can give it to you.

You've got to get it for yourself.

And what this parable illustrates to us is that in the average congregation, about half the people have neglected to do that. Five out of ten, you see.

[12:40] And so when the crisis comes, most of the people aren't ready for it. Now, it would be probably wrong for me to say that we as a parish are at a point of crisis.

But we are in a measure. And a lot of people are tired because they've been asked too many times.

They've been abused too often. And they've run out of oil. And there's no joy left for them. And when the crisis comes, they're just not ready for it.

Because we haven't really called on the source of supply, which is to be at the center of our life together as a congregation.

So the question is, where do we get oil? Now, you will know that at the center of our faith is the promise made way back in Jeremiah that I will take that stone, heavy, hard heart out of you and I will give you a new heart.

[14:02] You will know that at the center of our communion service are the words of Jesus Christ. Come unto me, all that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

You will know that one of the central stories of the New Testament is the story of Jesus going to a woman and saying to her, if you will ask of me a drink, I will give you water so you will never thirst again.

And this is what our faith is about. That God has done something for us in Christ which provides for us an unending supply of his Holy Spirit so that we are to live our lives not as those who are drooping with fatigue and have done all that could be expected of us to do, but as those who are in touch with a constantly renewing source of God's goodness and God's grace imparted to us by his Holy Spirit which we must needs appropriate for ourselves.

And then when you are in touch with that supply and somebody comes along and says, can you give me of yourself? Can you give me of your time?

Can you give me of your money? And you don't have to say, well, I'm sorry. I'm all booked up. I'm all booked up.

[15:36] I haven't much time and I'm almost out of money. But what you become aware of is that if you were to give all that you had of self, of time, and of money, you would only be making a small return on what you had already been given.

That's what it's about. That's what the source of supply of oil is meant to mean. So that nobody's coming around asking you for the dregs of what you have left over.

People are asking you, Christ is asking you, to give out of the abundance of what he has given to you. And you see, most of us don't understand that because that's a terrible generalization.

Probably most of us do understand it, but I want to remind you of it again. To understand that God has not put himself in the position of being a beggar.

God has provided and is providing more for us than we can ever want. And you have the evidence of that today in the fruits of the field and the evidence of the harvest, in the material provision that is given to us in this province of British Columbia.

[17:10] That's evident on every hand. Every body of water is full of logs and fish and there is just a great abundance of things that God has given us for which we owe him thanks.

But there are far deeper human needs which can't be met by logs and fish and pumpkins but which has to be met by God's gift to us of himself by his Holy Spirit.

and that's the thing that provides us with the abundance of what we need where the summons comes to join in the celebration. We're ready.

We don't have to go out and stumble around in the dark and see if we can find some dealer who can provide for us after hours against the bylaws. We're ready because that's what we've received.

And so I would like you on this Thanksgiving Sunday to be even more aware of the fact of God's provision for us.

[18 : 24] But the reason you're here today is because God has something to give you and you need to have the grace and we need to have the grace to receive.

we're at the end I think as a parish of asking people for any more. I think people are tired of being asked for things.

I think we've got to spend the time making sure that people who are members of this congregation nominal members or members who have been alienated or members who have lost interest or members who are tired or members who feel that they've been just pushed too far of making them aware that God's provision for their deepest needs is full and empty.

That he can as the lesson was read for us this morning come and buy wine and bread and milk without money and without price.

It's there and it's available and what's available to us in this communion service is the very body of Christ broken for you and the blood of Christ shed for you.

[19 : 48] And until we become aware that what God has done for us in Christ is to provide for us and we by faith have to receive that then I don't think there will come a time when we can go and say now this is what I want you to give in the return of thanksgiving for all that you've been given.

I don't think church people today are aware of all that God has made available to them and I think we need as a congregation to become aware of that.

that awareness of God's provision for us is the thing that we have to know for ourselves and for our for the senior members of our congregation for the young people for the students for the children for the families for the husbands and wives to become aware of all that God has given to us.

and they came everyone whose heart stirred him up and everyone whom his spirit made willing and they brought the Lord's offering. His wishes, may not trump you wonder how are a firm it how will you what've harvest we