

We Will Leave the Light on for You

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church

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November 8, 2020

Matthew 25:1–13

It's been quite a week and we are very tired. When I began preparing for this message on Monday, who knew what was going to happen? I found myself, like so many times since this past March, thinking that my message will change many times before it would reach this point on Sunday morning. On this past Monday, the only thing we knew was we would not get a quick answer to the election and whatever was going to happen a portion of our country would be unhappy.

As the dust settles and we have some answers and direction, we know there is a lot of work to do to mend the rift in our nation. We have a long way to go before we feel united in our country.

What better thing than a wedding to take our mind off of the disease that we are feeling. Let's see if a time-honored celebration of the uniting of two people can speak to us in this difficult time of division.

We read from the gospel of Matthew about those who are to attend a wedding feast.

Matthew 25:1–13

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 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, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, “Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.” Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps.

The foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” 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.” 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. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, “Lord, Lord, open to us.” He replied, “Truly I tell you, I do not know you.” Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Ok so maybe this was not the wedding celebration that we had hoped. It is not the party like the one Jesus went to in Cana. You know the one where they ran out of wine and Jesus saved the day with more and better wine! Now that was a celebration. That would have taken our minds off what we are dealing with today! This wedding in Matthew is a bit more serious. This wedding is one of Jesus’ parables. One thing we do know about parables is that there is always more than meets the eye.

The parable of the bridesmaids was a favorite with the early church members. There was great eagerness and anticipation of Christ’s return and the ushering in of the kingdom of God for the early Christians. Many believed that would happen within their lifetime. But, Christ did not return even when the faithful began to die. The believers had to wait...and wait some more. Some lost interest and faded away, others became skeptical and angry feeling they had been duped. This parable reminds them that Jesus, the bridegroom, will come but when Jesus returns is out of the follower’s control. Those who have prepared for the long distance run of waiting will be ready, those who want quick results will not.

We read the bible not only trying to understand the first generations of Christians and their feelings of uncertainty but we read God's message for us today. We are living with enough uncertainty to fill this planet!

The first thing Jesus does is set the stage and the stakes for this parable. The Kingdom of God is like...The Kingdom of God. Jesus is trying to convey what it will be like with God in charge and everyone realizes it. In God's kingdom, we play the supporting role of bridesmaids. We are not the bride or the groom but the bridesmaid. As bridesmaids we have a task. We are charged with welcoming the bridegroom and announcing his arrival to his bride.

One thing about being in the supportive role is that there are a lot of things beyond our control. Things do not go as expected. We don't know when the bridegroom will arrive.

This has been the longest week. How many of us have watched the screens on our phones, iPads and TVs willing for something to change; something to happen to make the results definitive. Nevertheless, it evaded our wishes. It was out of our control. It was out of the commentator's control who awkwardly tried to keep the political patter going waiting for something to happen. It was out of the candidate's control. Bless each of those local vote counters who did their job when everyone was clamoring for them to do it quicker.

We are not in control of the virus. We cannot will the numbers to go down or to make it fade away. As much as we would like everyone to be safe, we are not in control of our neighbors or the actions of others.

This week we are like the bridesmaids waiting for the election results... waiting for the COVID numbers to peak and start going down. Waiting.

Although the bridesmaids are on the sidelines, they are more than bystanders along the way. They are charged with a crucial task. They are

the ones who carry the message that the bridegroom is with us and they light the way for the bridegroom to meet the bride. To do their task they need to prepare and make sure they have enough oil in the lamps to light the way. All works fine if things go as expected, but of course they don't and the bridegroom is delayed. Those without forethought end up lacking what it takes to light the way.

We are the purveyors of the Good news that God is with us. We are the ones to share with others that there is a better way. We bear witness that love does win even when it looks pretty dark. We are here to share that the bridegroom is among us. We, as God's beloved people, are tasked with the job to announce the arrival of the one who brings all the light into the world.

What a message; what a privilege. We are not going to let others distract us or take away that message. We will not let those who are consumed with power and influence rule the day and dim the light we have to share. Whatever political persuasion we align ourselves with, we are here as Christ's followers to stand with the bridegroom who comes to show us the way.

One thing we have been made painfully aware of over the years is that we cannot relegate our moral and just compass to elected officials. We hope that our elected officials see themselves as the bridesmaids holding the light for the one who comes and sharing that light in the world, but we cannot leave it to them or anyone else.

The parable shows us that being a bridesmaid is not enough. Saying we are Christian is not enough. Saying our country is founded on Christian ideals is not enough. We make choices about how much our faith in God influences our lives. Giving a nod to our faith may work when things are going smoothly and well but when darkness hits with illness or loss or uncertainty, we sometimes need to dig deep and find the strength of our

faith. It comes down to what we are willing to bring to God's party. Jesus sums it up as a matter between the wise and foolish maids. When it comes to being part of the celebration, it is wise to bring more than enough to see us to the celebration.

We all know people who seem to have a deep reserve of faith particularly in the times when they start to falter. When we draw near to people with a deep reserve of faith, a wondrous thing happens. Their light and their faith spark our reserves as well. When we share our light and bring them together, our fragile little light turns into a beacon that shines out.

We are in a confounding time. Although our week ended in more certainty about who our leader will be, we are still facing a lot of unknowns. Together, we keep that light burning knowing that it will bring the bridegroom. With so many things we cannot control, we do what we can. That may be enough. For those who are flailing in the dark, we can assure them that the light is here.

At noon today we will be electing church members to the Session, the Board of Deacons and the Church Nominating Committee. Becky, Emma, Joey, Kathy, Jessi and Hannah have agreed to serve the church as Elders. They have agreed to share their light in helping to make decisions about ministry and mission, to creatively think how we continue to leave an impact on this community and the world, and to be a beacon of hope and love to all people. John, Verona, Lisa, Amanda and Nancy have said yes to shine their light in the way of the Deacons, who in this very challenging time are keeping our community together through calls and cards, soup and most of love. We will elect Judy, Patty Gar, Bev, Sue and Larry, and bless them for being the ones who make the calls to ask you the members if you feel called to serve and shine your lamp in this way.

In this very difficult week, which has come on the heels of many other dark and difficult weeks, we celebrate the light that shines in the darkness. We are reminded that the Kingdom of God is a celebration that brings light into the world. What could be better than that? If we do not hold our light high, it is a world that will stay in darkness. This week find ways to share your light of faith with others. Do things that nurture and grow your faith. Together as a community, built on faith in God, we will keep the lights on for all who want to see. Each of us has a role in this celebration of God's kingdom. Let us leave the light on for others to find their way.

Thanks, be to God. Amen.