

November 8 10:45a : Why Give: Witness Part 2

First Lesson: Psalm 78:1-7

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 25: 1-13

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We are in a new sermon series entitled “Why Give?”; a series designed to help us as a community discover the motivation for why we give in the areas of our membership vows; prayers, presence, service, gifts and witness; especially when times are as they are now; tense, stressful, uncertain, divisive and the list goes on.

- And why I am excited to explore our passage of Matthew today is because this passage indirectly addresses the topic I am inviting us to discern as a church collectively; why give as it pertains to the membership vow of witness.

- And so before exploring how our Matthew text addresses this; let me first share a little information on where our membership vows stemmed from;
- So a little history as I shared in part 1 of this sermon topic in our earlier service behind why these five areas became the tenets to our Methodist Church core values; when new members join The United Methodist Church, they profess the vows of the [Baptismal Covenant](#).
- They promise to be loyal to Christ through the global United Methodist Church and to be active participants in a local congregation, pledging "to faithfully participate in its ministries by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service and their witness."
- Furthermore, the word "witness" was added by the 2008 United Methodist General Conference to highlight the mission and evangelistic responsibilities of church membership.
- It also reminds United Methodists to live out our vows publicly, according to the Rev. Mark W. Stamm, professor

of Christian worship at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

- "All of those (others) can be done fairly privately," he said (meaning prayer, presence, gifts and service).
- However as I paraphrase his statements as it pertains to what it means to be a witness he said, "If we're making disciples for the transformation of the world, then we need to remind ourselves that this isn't just an act of piety that we do privately ...
- Being a witness does not just apply to the people with whom we worship God — our local church —
- On the contrary, being a witness involves living out the gospel publicly in ways that can be seen.... that's what witness is all about."
- So to put it even plainer; to be a witness means to not just say that we are followers of Christ; but to strive **to live out our lives in such a way** where our light of Christ is evident;
- **To live out our lives in a way** where our love is evident;

- Being a witness means engaging the world and others in a way where our inner Imago Dei; the God within us, penetrates through in such a mighty way; where the outside world can just tell that we are indeed sincere;
- **Where the outside world** can see that we are indeed trustworthy and sincere;
- **Where the outside world** can tangibly see that we are not just self righteous people who pride ourselves upon values that are merely just lip service;
- But instead we are followers of Christ striving to live out our lives as righteous seekers embodying what it means to love God and love our neighbors.
- **And so bringing in our Matthew passage today for the discussion the Parable of the Ten Virgins begins; this is a parable that is making a**

comparison to what the kingdom of heaven will be like;

- The **ten virgins** took **lamps** (Greek, *lampadas*) and went out to meet the bridegroom, who would come with his male attendants to the bride's house.
- The five **foolish** (Greek, *morai*, from which comes "moron") maidens did not take an extra supply of oil, but the five **wise** ("thoughtful, prudent") ones did.
- In this parable, the bridegroom I would imagine, probably had to wash and dress, as well as eat, after finishing work.
- His companions may have been slow in assembling at his house for the procession to the bride's home.
- After waiting for some hours, the virgins all became drowsy.
- The Word says that they **slumbered** ("nodded, dozed, fell asleep") and **slept** ("kept on sleeping").

- **At midnight**, when least expected, there came a cry: **Behold, the bridegroom!**
- The ten virgins quickly rose and trimmed the wicks of their tiny clay lamps, which burned olive oil.
- The foolish asked for oil; for their lamps were **going out**—a warning against the danger of letting one’s spiritual experience get low.
- But the wise knew they could not spare any of their own supply.
- So the foolish had to go in search of oil.
- Meanwhile the bridegroom came (v. 10).
- Those that were **ready** went in with him to the **marriage feast**, which usually lasted from one to three weeks, **and the door was shut.**
- This is the language of settled destiny.
- The foolish virgins returned and cried for the door to be opened—but their cries were in vain.

- The bridegroom disowned those who were outside in the dark.
- The main lesson is then given by Jesus: **Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.** (v. 13).
- This vivid parable is a warning that there is such a thing as being too late, that once the door of eternal destiny is closed it cannot be reopened.
- The story is an admonition to be filled with the Spirit (typified by the oil) and always ready for Christ's return.

So transitioning all of this for the times we are in currently, the interpretation of our parable that I shared amongst the majority of biblical scholars is normally tied to the eschatological component of our faith; the after life.

- In other words you and I do not know when Christ will come again and the admonition is to always

have oil in our lamps and be ready for him to return.

- However I am also seeing a more pressing message for us today for the church, as it pertains to these last years, months, weeks, days and hours that our country and world have experienced together.
- **We as you all know as a people, have entered another very historic moment.**
- For as a country/world, I can say that we all have been on the edge of our seats, awaiting on who will be the administrative leadership for the next presidential term.
- And I will repeat from the earlier sermon and say with a level of honesty, vulnerability and transparency that I was initially at a loss with how to approach this particular sermon because frankly, the country has been almost equally divided regarding who they thought should be in office.

- I am also fully aware that although we at First UMC profess to be a reconciling church and ministry who seeks to affirm and include all people regardless of race, sex, gender identification, sexual preference and more; not everyone is happy with Joe Biden and Kamala Harris being our next president elect/vice president elect of our country.
- So after thoughtful consideration, I have decided to approach all that we have experienced as a country and allow the parable to speak for us;
- For the major epiphany I have become to learn and discover as I look at this parable in a new way with fresh eyes, is that the first thing that we need to make sure we do as a church **is respond!**
- For the church to remain silent, it occurred to me is equivalent to the 5 bridesmaids who neglected to have oil in their lamps;

- For when the bridegroom did come, because those bridesmaids neglected to have their oil on time, they missed out on the marriage feast altogether;
- And frankly **in a world** who has been grieving and hurting;
- **A world grieved** by racial division;
- **A world grieved by** this pandemic;
- **In a world** who has been grieving as our sisters and brothers have been ravished by violence, oppression, evil acts and rhetoric;
- **In a world** who at one point I imagine turned to the church for leadership for assistance, for guidance for anything;
- Only to receive silence;
- I realized that perhaps this parable is addressing the church in a direct way to suggest that it is time for us to make sure that we have a response...

- For our silence is comparable to the foolish bridesmaids who ran out of oil;
- And my epiphany is if we have no oil, then perhaps we have no business being at the metaphorical feast to begin with.
- **So the million dollar question I would like to raise is why does the church tend to be silent in matters such as this and more?**
- Why does the church knowingly or unknowingly neglect to have enough oil on hand?
- Because on the very basic level, we know that we will need the oil....
- So why don't we have the oil?
- And so I will boldly take a stab at addressing the silence or shortage of oil....
- For I will state it again as I have begun to do so lately, that sometimes I am tempted to be silent, because

frankly it is terrifying as a minister of the gospel, who has to determine how to navigate the slippery slope of preaching the truth without offending anyone.

- Furthermore, I suspect that silence plagues the constituents of the church because of a lot of us not knowing how the gospel might respond to the issues that negatively impact our world.
- Lastly, I believe our silence or lack of oil may come from not understanding where we might get more oil from.
- Either way I am convinced more than ever after engaging this parable in a way that I never have before, it occurred to me that this parable is not just about us preparing for when Jesus comes again;
- This parable is teaching us that as a church, we must be prepared for the world today;
- This parable is telling us as the church that we need oil...and A LOT of it!

- For if we don't have oil, then a church budget becomes obsolete...
- If we don't have oil then we are nothing but an exclusive club....**so church WE NEED OIL!**
- **We need oil** because one thing this election process has revealed to me is that almost half of the country has become indifferent to the fact that the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven is tarnished;
- **We need oil**, because the basic concepts of love, mutual respect and the overall common decency of humanity; the data reveals.... is becoming extinct.
- So church the takeaway from our gospel this morning is **that we need oil on hand;**
- For there will be no time to think we can get some after the fact;
- **We need oil and a lot of it**, for **it is the oil** that will unite us again;

- **It is the oil** that will dissipate this smoldering stench of evil and hatred;
- **It is the oil** that will replenish the seeds of love and basic human kindness....**WE NEED OIL**....
- For if we don't have oil to fuel our lamps of Christ, then we are not doing the work of Christ period.
- Furthermore **when we are silent** in the midst of racial injustice;
- **When we are silent** in the midst of evil, tyrannical leadership;
- **When we are silent** when the commandment of loving God and loving neighbor is being challenged;
- Church we have not just dimmed our light; we have dimmed our witness as pursuers of Christ light.
- So in the days coming ahead, church we have a lot of work to do;

- And our main work in light of all that has transpired in our country and world is to discover where our oil reserves as a church are being stored.
- And the primary source of where our oil resides is in the Word of God;
- So as your spiritual leader I commit to helping us to tap into the oil reserves of God's Word;
- My hope is that through our Why Give sermon series, we will discover where some of our oil reserves are as it pertains to our prayers, presence, gifts, missional service and witness.
- As a ministry team as a whole we are committed to providing more spiritual groups online and in other formats so that we might replenish our oil for the rough days ahead;
- The bottom line, our First UMC ministerial teams will be structured in a way where we will always have plenty of oil on hand;

- For it is our oil that becomes our witness;
- And as long as I am appointed for such a time as this, my commitment as your spiritual leader is to ensure that together our oil never runs out.
- Let the church say Amen!