

## Sharing the Oil

Amos 5:18-24

Matthew 25: 1-13

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Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

### *Amos 5:18-24*

Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.

### *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.’ And 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.’ But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

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Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. Be aware, be alert, for we do not know when what we have held onto and valued will really be worthy of that honor in our lives. Be aware, be alert, for we do not know when what we have offered to others will make a priceless difference. There are those awakening events in our lives which have the power to not only transform the way we look at the world, but also what we value, what gives meaning to our lives. When the day, the hour, comes, it may be as something small and personal, or it may be something immense that ripples for generations.

One such event was the sinking of the Titanic. She sank over a century ago, yet stories of the horrible night still remain with us. As women and children were being placed into lifeboats, one frightened, wealthy woman suddenly thought of something she needed, and asked permission to return to her stateroom before the lifeboat was lowered. She was granted three minutes, or they would leave without her. She ran across the deck that was already slanted at a dangerous angle. She raced through the gambling room with all the money that had rolled to one side, ankle deep. She came to her stateroom and quickly pushed aside her diamond rings and

expensive bracelets and necklaces as she reached to the shelf above her bed and grabbed three small oranges. She quickly found her way back to the lifeboat and got in.

Twenty minutes earlier she would not have chosen a crate of oranges over the smallest diamond, but death had boarded the Titanic. A North Atlantic iceberg and a hole in the hull of the unsinkable ship had transformed all values. Instantaneously, priceless things had become worthless. Worthless things had become priceless. And in that moment, she valued three small oranges over a crate of diamonds. In that moment, her lamp was lit with the fragrance of three precious oranges, not the brilliance of expensive stones. The woman was making preparations for living on a lifeboat. She had brought a flask to share her oil. She was awake and alert to what was coming.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus's parable of the ten bridesmaids compels us to look at ourselves, our values, our readiness to act in faith, our desire and ability to work together for a common good. The bridesmaids are awaiting the groom, Jesus' metaphor for his return at the end of time, but there is so much to happen before the groom arrives. Waiting is not a passive activity with eyes attentive only to the distant horizon, but rather a here and now time to feed the hungry, invite in the lonely, forgive those who have offended us, care for the poor, welcome the stranger, care for the gifts of creation, learn to understand and heal the differences between us, and to love God with all heart, soul and mind. It is indeed a time to let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.

The ten bridesmaids all arrive on time to await the groom, they all have their lamps to light the way, and they all, in spite of perhaps their best efforts to stay awake, become drowsy and fall asleep. It's hard for each of them to sustain the level of alertness they arrived with. They are however suddenly awakened by the arrival of the groom, and now the differences between them quickly emerge. Some did not bring enough oil for their lamps, they did not bring enough faith to light their way through the darkness. The others brought enough oil, and were proud of that foresight, but rationed it with a clenched fist. They had faith to light their way but did not extend the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, to those around them in need. Their lamps were lit but their vision was limited.

Their focus was narrow and individual; imagine if they could have worked together, if they could have been united. Together they could have shared the oil among them, they could have taken turns bearing the brightest light, and all would have celebrated as the groom had planned. They could have taken turns sleeping, resting easy in the confidence that they were prepared. They would have been awake to truly live by the light, and to bear that light into the world. They could have been a lifeboat for one another in a long night of waiting.

Friends, right about now many of us feel as if we are running on empty and we are in need of some oil for our lamps. We are indeed in the midst of a dark night of waiting. We are worried and disturbed and anxious as we await the presidential election results, a Coronavirus vaccine, the redemption of a divided country, the honoring of shared values, the acceptance of all of God's beloved children, and the healing of the earth from our abuses. We are awake and alert to just how late in the day it might actually be, and we fear that we will not have enough oil for this long night of waiting. We squint and strain to see in the darkness as we await an unknown day, an unknown hour.

Friends, the assurance is this---we do have enough oil.

Jesus often taught in parables, telling stories of everyday life that are rich with symbols and metaphors. Oil is an important symbol as a sign of being anointed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus used the metaphor for himself immediately after his baptism, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me...” We were anointed by the Holy Spirit in the waters of our baptism, blessed with the sign and seal of God's grace for our faith and our life. We may become tired and weary, but we have enough oil for this long night.

We are a people of hope, a people of the resurrection, able to lean into the love and steadfastness of God even as so much around us is changing. We have the oil our lamps need to light the night. Let us work together, let us be both gentle and generous with each other, let us be ready to act in faith, sharing our burning desire and ability to work together for a common good, for the values we honor. Even if we only have three small oranges to share, we are offering hope and connection to others. Let us offer support to one another, and in turn accept encouragement when it is offered to us. Keep awake, for we do not know when what we have offered to others will make a priceless difference. It may be as something small and personal, or it may be something immense in this historic time that ripples for generations.

I want to share with you a beautiful and profound prayer poem by liturgist and activist Katherine Hawker, reminding us that our oil is abundant and glows brightest when it is shared.

Ten lamps gathered, with oil enough for all.  
Ten lamps gathered,  
But five are empty showing careless disregard.  
Ten lamps gathered,  
Five blaze with oil abundant enough to share.  
Ten lamps gathered,  
Five lifeless when laziness and greed collide.  
Ten lamps gathered...  
How many will burn tonight?  
Creator God, giver of oil, hear us as we pray...  
For generous hearts to share oil with our neighbors.  
Creator God, giver of oil, hear us as we pray...  
For the vision necessary to leave our comfortable seats in search of oil.  
Creator God, giver of oil, hear us as we pray...  
For forgiveness for the ways our selfishness and our apathy collide.

Ten lamps gathered, with oil enough for all.  
Come children of God, into a sacred circle  
Where sharing creates abundance  
And no one leaves hungry. Amen.