

Sermon for November 12, 2017

“Go Buy Some Oil Now!”

Matthew 25:1-13

Can I borrow a cup of sugar? I know. No one borrows a cup of sugar any more. That is so cliché. But there are times when we need to borrow something. Circumstances back us into a corner, and we need to borrow a car, or a leaf blower, or a telephone.

I remember the year Melissa and I got married. I was still in seminary and we were living in an apartment. To save money we didn't bother to get cable. Well the Clemson - Carolina game that year was on a cable channel. When I discovered this, I went to our next door neighbor, who was also a seminary student and who had cable. So we borrowed her living room for an afternoon to watch the game on her TV.

But there are some things you just can't borrow because they can't be exchanged from one person to another. You can't borrow love. That is something which has to come from one's own heart. You can't borrow a good relationship. That is something you have to develop on your own. And you can't borrow faith. No matter what the circumstances and no matter how much others would like to loan you these things, they just cannot be loaned from one person to another.

Jesus' disciples asked him, “When will we know that the end of the world is coming?” Jesus' response goes on for two chapters of Matthew's Gospel. About half way through Jesus tells a parable about borrowing. It seems that there was this girl who had asked 10 of her friends to be bridesmaids for her wedding. Five of these bridesmaids were level headed and five were scatterbrained. The five level headed ones knew that the groom was coming from a long way and could arrive at any time of the day or night. So they brought enough oil to see them through to the time when the groom would come.

The five scatter brained ones did not. They fretted over their hair and their dresses and who they were going to dance with at the reception. But they didn't think about the oil for their lamps. So they didn't bring enough.

It just so happened that the groom was delayed. They all slept and then at midnight the call came that the groom was at the edge of town and that he would be there any minuet. The scatterbrained bridesmaids realized their

lamps were running out so they turned to the level headed ones and said, “Can we borrow a cup of oil?” The level headed ones said, “If we loan you some, then we will both run out.” You had better run to the store and buy some before the groom gets here. So they ran to get some, and, lo and behold, the groom arrived. By the time they got back the doors were shut and they were left out.

Now there are a few things that just don't add up in this parable. Why couldn't someone who was not in the wedding party go and get the oil for them and why couldn't they get into the party after the door had been shut? As usual in Jesus' parables there is more here than meets the eye. In the parables a wedding is a symbol of the coming of the Kingdom or as we would say the second coming. The groom is Jesus and the bride is the church. The bridesmaids here represent the individual believers who are waiting for Jesus to return and be finally united with the church.

So too the oil is more than just oil. You see oil is what makes the flame burn in a lamp. Without oil there is no light to shine in the darkness. The oil represents faith, or the Holy Spirit, or a vital relationship with God. Whichever it is, it's that thing in a believer that makes the light of God shine in their lives through dark times. We don't know when dark times are coming and we all need to have a strong faith relationship with God to make it through those times.

The problem is many Christians don't develop a deep faith. They maintain a shallow supply of faith - just enough to see them through the everyday troubles. Then a disaster strikes. Someone dies or an illness devastates them. When that happens it is too late to develop faith. In the midst of a crisis is not the time to try to learn how to depend on God.

And you can't borrow soul oil. You can get help from a Christian friend, but you cannot borrow their faith. A vital relationship with God is something you have to develop on your own. So go buy some oil today! Start making daily conversations with God a part of your life. Study God's word and deepen your faith. Humble yourself in service to others so that you can participate in God's love for the world. Seek justice and love mercy and question your cherished assumptions so you can grow. You never know when darkness will come. If you want to be able to shine some light in the darkness of your life, get to know Jesus while it is still light. Then you will recognize Him when the darkness comes.