

Don't Settle for Less!

Matthew 25: 1-13

Rev. Ed Hoekstra

Disturbing on the surface: At first glance, this parable is somewhat disturbing for the following reasons: First, the five wise maidens appear to be selfish in not wanting to share their oil. Secondly, this parable has often been viewed as a lesson of eternal judgment. I believe this lesson from Jesus is much more about the Kingdom of God and God's abundant grace, than it is about judgment. Jesus actually says so at the start of this parable in **Matthew 25: 1, "Then the Kingdom of heaven will be like this..."**

"Give us some of your oil!" In Matthew 25: 8 we read about the five foolish maidens who were not ready to wait for the bridegroom (Christ) because they were running out of oil. They asked the five wise maidens, who had lots, to share with them. It is important to keep in mind, that it was not just a matter of handing over the extra oil. The oil represents the abundance of God; it represents healing of the soul; and also the abundant indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The oil in the parable signifies the deep indwelling of God's love – God's grace with the individual! In other words, this 'oil' cannot be merely given out; it is inextricably connected to the individual, and deep within. I think it was like giving an arm or a leg away.

"You had better go..." In verse 9, the five wise maidens say to the five foolish ones, **"No! There will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves."** Again, literally, on the surface it looks like the five wise maidens are being selfish. (We all know that being selfish is not a wise way to live!) Keep in mind that Jesus is telling us this story to help us grasp the goodness, the abundance and the inclusiveness of the kingdom. A little extra oil will not get you by! In other words, do not settle for the least amount possible but set your sights on God wanting to fill you up with his spirit!

The word 'go' means to travel and to journey, but it also means a dying or a death. There is a dynamic in the Kingdom of God in death that is critical to resurrection life. One needs to die to oneself, one's misguided ambitions, and make your ambition, (your desire) for the abundance of God's Kingdom. We tend to desire so much less to get us by, than what is available through Christ's love for each of us. This parable is about Grace and fullness, not about retribution, condemnation, or wrath. The way of the world of an 'eye for an eye' is still so alive in people's thinking. "If you do wrong, you are going to pay" is not the way God sees things. He is a God of forgiveness. **In Romans 5: 8 we read this, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** Christ died not for the righteous, but for the ungodly. Only through Christ are we righteous. I think most of us fall into the category of the five foolish maidens.

Knowing: In verse 10 and 11, we read “*And while they went to buy it (the oil), the bridegroom came, and those who were ready, went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut.*” Then the foolish ones came also and said, “**Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he replied, truly I tell, I do not know you.**” I believe Jesus says ‘truly’ here to explain the way the things are. In other words, this is the way things are -that Jesus does not know them because these maidens have chosen not to make Christ’s abundant love a priority in their lives.

The Greek word for ‘know’ used here in the text is ‘Eido’ meaning first of all to see (understand) with your physical eyes. Jesus is so into ‘face to face’ relationships. Jesus is into closeness. He wants us to see him. Knowing of course has to do with understanding, and seeing is connected to it. We all have said to others from time to time as things were explained to us, “I see what you mean”. This implies a deep understanding where you can see clearly. Jesus wants us to see him. One theologian put it this way. “**Jesus did not say, “I do not love you”, or “I do not like you”, or “I do not want you”, or “I do not desire you”;** he said, “**I do not know you” – and He wants to know us!!** He wants a deep relationship with us. Through his love, he has taken away any separation between us and God. Jesus wants you to know him face to face! He wants you to see him! We too often choose to settle for the things of the world, and do spend the time to know Jesus more. We settle for less than we are offered.

Being Awake: In verse 13, Jesus encourages us to stay awake because we do not know the day or the hour. In terms of God’s kingdom our preparation is very important, but it should not be motivated by fear of condemnation. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is Grace – unconditional love - not fear! Readiness entails dying to oneself, and not desiring less than Christ offers. I believe Jesus was saying that he is already here but we do not see him (We read in Luke 17: 20, 21 the words of Jesus where he says that the Kingdom of God is already here). He wants you to know him and see him. Jesus is not an angry judge who will keep you out of his kingdom. He is about wanting us to receive the oil of forgiveness, of healing and love through his Spirit! Don’t settle for less! Stock up on His abundance which will strengthen you through times of waiting, of uncertainty and of loss. He will keep your light shining now (today) and forever! Amen.