

“Do You Have Enough to Share?”

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Matthew 25:1-13

Thank you again for the reception that was held last Sunday in honor of Ministers' Appreciation Month. That afternoon as I looked through the cards many of you shared, I appreciated what you wrote. As I thought about it later, I realized that I needed to call my two closest friends in ministry and express my appreciation for not only their friendship, but also for their ministry. We were in seminary together, longer ago than I care to admit. These two friends, Ron and Dennis, mean a great deal to me. I did call them last week. It was interesting, as if I had poured water on a dry sponge. They both just soaked it up. We don't have the opportunity to get together very often; we talked about trying to meet sometime for lunch. Dennis lives in Guthrie and Ron lives in Denison, Texas.

Something else happened that I had forgotten would happen but should have remembered. Every time I call Ron, the secretary at the church answers the phone saying, “May I ask who is calling please?” You know what that means, don't you? When a secretary or receptionist says that, she's thinking, “I've gotta find out if you are important enough to take this call.” You know what the best thing to say when they ask that? I've got a suggestion for you. The next time a receptionist or secretary says “May I ask who is calling?” Just say, “Yes.” They can just go ahead and ask.

I should have remembered, and bless her heart, I shouldn't do this to the poor woman. Every time she asks that question, I say, “Tell Ron that Tiger Woods is calling.” I hear her go and tell Ron, “It's that same guy. Tiger Woods is calling.” Last week when I called and she asked who was calling, I said, “Tell Ron it's Barack Obama. I need to fill some positions on my cabinet,” She knew who it was and said, “What position do you need to fill?” I said, “The secretary of Baloney!” She told Ron, he laughed, she laughed, and I laughed.

That's silly, and it might seem that this parable is silly, but it isn't. There is a difference between silliness and foolishness. Let me give you an example. Recently a church cartoon came across my desk. It was the

very best one I have ever seen. It was a committee meeting and the chairman of the committee was saying to the members, “We have learned that 20 percent of the people in the church are doing 80 percent of the work.” You know, that’s true in most churches. I’ve read studies about that. Usually 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work. This committee chairman then said, “We need to see what we can do to motivate the 20 percent to do more!” That’s foolish. We need to motivate everyone to do more and even more importantly, we need to reach beyond ourselves to motivate others by sharing with them the good news of life in Christ.

This is a strange parable. It’s hard for us to understand the wedding customs of those days. The wedding party might last for two or three weeks; the bridesmaids would go to the groom’s house to wait for the groom to come. In our story, if it were told today, instead of lamps, the bridesmaids would have flashlights—you can imagine what Madison Avenue would do with that; five of the bridesmaids would have flashlights with Duracell coppertop batteries. The other five would have Brand X and their batteries would run down and they would be in the dark.

It is ironic that we have in our story a discussion of an oil shortage. Think about that in our world today. This is a different kind of oil. In the 23rd chapter of Matthew, known as the “woes” chapter, time and time again Jesus says, “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees. . .” you need to do this and this. One of the woes is “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees. You tithe but you have neglected the weightier matters of the Law: justice, mercy, and faith.” The weightier matters are the oil. If we want to be prepared for this season coming (this is an eschaton story, an end-of-times story); if we want to be prepared when Christ comes, we need to have the oil of preparation, which is living a life concerned with justice and mercy and faith.

The old biblical commentator, William Barclay, says something I love about this passage. Barclay says, “You can’t borrow a relationship with Christ.” Don’t you like that? If you want to have a relationship with Christ, that old time religion—Mom and Pop’s religion, is not enough. You have to have your *own* relationship with Christ. You can’t borrow someone else’s. You need to be prepared when Christ comes.

How can we be prepared? I read something fascinating recently about the painter, Norman Rockwell. Do you know why we love his

paintings so much? Norman Rockwell once said, "I don't paint life as I see it. I paint life as I would like it to be." As followers of Christ, we are called to live life as God would like it to be. That's one way that we are prepared.

I find it shameful that a portion of the church has made a cottage industry of scaring people about the second coming of Christ. Certain authors have made millions of dollars scaring people. We believe that when Christ comes it will not be wholly oblivion, but holy communion.

Hear this message of the parable, there are times in life when it is too late. Jesus says this about God not to scare us, but because he is honest with us. That's how life works. There are times in life when it's too late to make amends. We can't make things up. It's too late to do that.

Because of this and because we face uncertainty in our times, one reason we like coming to worship so much is because we can depend on the orderliness. We call what is printed in the bulletin an "Order of Worship." It's upsetting to us when we're singing a song that we know, we've memorized the words, and we look up at the screen and someone has changed the words to the hymn. We like being able to depend on things, don't we?

There is a caution about this. One time a minister prayed this prayer, "Lord, help something to happen here in our worship service today that is not printed in the bulletin." Don't you love that? We believe in a God of surprises. Listen to this prayer to the God of surprises:

"It startles us to realize that in this very hour your moment of opportunity may come, in a calling or a conversion, in an ending, a beginning, or in a fulfilling. We tend to expect life to go on as usual, O God, and then you fling wide a door we had not even noticed, a door of possibility for us to walk through, or a door through which we are drawn, prepared or not! Come to us, Lord Jesus. Stir our hearts with the passion of love and the joy of anticipation. As we wait in faith for what we do not yet see, help us to be alert. Make us ready for the fulfillment of your holy purpose."

Make us ready because there will come a time when it's too late.

I wish that everyone of your could have been with me this past week when I visited with Katherine Goff's sons, James and Vernon. I said at that funeral service that in almost 40 years of leading funeral services

I looked forward more to being a part of that service than with any other service with which I had been associated. The reason was because of what those men said about their mother. They didn't have to make excuses. They didn't have to lie about her. They talked to me about how she had shared her faith with them in such a way that their faith was stronger.

William Barclay is right. You cannot borrow a relationship with Christ, but you can share a relationship with Christ. Have you ever wondered what your children, your friends, or others will say about you after you've died? It's too late then for you to do anything to convince them. What will your friends, your family, your children say about you after you have died? Will they say "He shared his faith with me, she shared her faith with me in such a way that I know God is real. I know God is present in my life."

We have misinterpreted this parable. The point of the parable mainly is not that there is a time that it is too late—that's an important lesson from the parable, but it's not the most important lesson. Do you know what's wrong in the parable? The five bridesmaids who were supposedly wise were afraid to share their oil because they were afraid they would run out of oil. When we share in God's name, we never run out. Whether it's time, time for our children, time for our families, time for our friends, time for our church, if it's forgiveness, kindness, service, love, we always have enough to share.

In our invitation hymn today we are going to sing these words: "In this very room there's quite enough love for one like me. There's quite enough joy and there's quite enough hope and quite enough power to chase away any gloom, for Jesus, Lord Jesus, is in this very room." The song doesn't end there. It's not one of those songs where we go and get in the corner and sing about God and me and our relationship to God. The hymn goes on to say there's enough love and joy and hope and power for all of us. Then we sing the words, "In this very room there's enough love and joy and hope and power for all the world." May it be so, in Christ's name. Amen.