

Sharing Some Oil?

Preacher: Rev. Lauren Lorincz

Date: November 6, 2011

11:18

My mom is teaching psychology this year and last week she began talking to her students about parenting styles. Apparently, there are three parenting styles as explained in their Psychology textbook—Authoritarian, where parents believe in obedience for its own sake, Permissive, where parents are lenient and can be overindulgent, and Authoritative, where parents combine warmth with age appropriate rules and responsibilities. Mom and I agreed that she and my dad are Authoritative parents, though in one of our epic fights when I was a teenager, I remember calling my mom a dictator (which would indicate more of an Authoritarian parenting style.) Though she pointed out at the time that she runs a benevolent dictatorship and I should be really happy about that.

But I have to give my parents credit—they taught my sister and me good values growing up, and one of the expectations in the Lorincz household was that we would be kind and share with one another. To reinforce the important lesson of sharing, every Christmas, Maureen and I would get at least one gift that we had to share with each other. The wrapping paper would typically read, "To Maureen and Lauren, Love Santa" and we'd open the gift to find usually a puzzle or board game, relatively easy things to share—until it wasn't.

We would want to take our joint gift to friends' houses or sleepovers and would have to ask for permission because this gift wasn't solely ours. Maureen, being the future lawyer, would almost work out a custody contract where she could use said toy or game for 3 days, I would get to use it for 3, and then we might play rock/paper/scissors for that extra day. We were pretty ingenious about having to share our present, but there really were times that sharing was hard and we'd just rather have that gift all to ourselves.

So it seems in today's passage from Matthew 25 about the 5 wise bridesmaids and the 5 foolish bridesmaids and their experiences of having enough oil or lacking an adequate oil supply, that sharing may not have been emphasized in their households. The passage isn't really about that, not about ethics and sharing within communities. The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids is about the coming of the Son of Man for the final judgment of all creation and the necessity for watching out and preparing for that day. This may sound crazy to us, but it was a widely held belief among the earliest followers of Jesus and even some Christians today.

The passage is about keeping watch, being ready, staying alert—we are to be the wise bridesmaids waiting for the bride and groom to return. Our task is to welcome them into their new household with lights and fire and a nice cozy ambience. We are to "keep awake" for we don't know the day nor the hour Jesus will be with us again.

New Testament scholar Raymond Brown points out that this parable makes only one point—be prepared for the Parousia (which means "presence," it's the Greek term for Jesus' Second Coming.) Therefore, the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids is not a general picture of ideal Christian life. If it were, the wise bridesmaids should have shared their oil with the foolish ones.
[1]

But I want to talk about this passage in light of an ideal Christian life. I found this parable particularly thought-provoking this week and I want to look at it from an ethical standpoint instead of thinking solely about the Second Coming of Christ. Because this week there were many people in and around Lexington who were without heat and light for hours or even days on end because of the snow storm on Saturday night.

And what happened? Schools, the library, churches, friends, and family all tried to help out neighbors without power—to share the heat and the light we might have with one another. Because that's what you do when people in your community are in trouble, you share your resources as best as you are able. You open up your heart and your home and your place of worship, you show hospitality and love to people who need it. You give what you can with what you have.

Because I'll tell you what, there are times when we may be the wise bridesmaids and there are times when we are the foolish ones, all of us. There will be times when we don't have enough oil because maybe we forgot to bring some, maybe you caught us unprepared, maybe we couldn't afford to get that extra bit of oil for the night, maybe we procrastinated, maybe a storm knocked out the power in our house and we don't have any light and heat to contribute.

And instead of turning us away and saying, "No! there will not be enough for you and for us" like those wise bridesmaids said—instead of that, we would all hope to hear, "Okay, well let's share, and we'll figure out what to do if someone's light goes out. Or maybe we can go next door and ask the neighbors for a little bit of oil and they'll help us." Charity. Sharing. To me, these are good values to have in community especially in times of crisis, but maybe all the time.

And as today is Joining Sunday, I think it's worth pointing out that sharing and compassion, that charity and caring deeply for one another in communities of faith is often what attracts people to churches. You can have a great building and a good preacher, spirited music and informative educational opportunities, but what keeps people in the pews and wanting to formally commit to being part of a church as Matt, Jenn, Mike, Alexis, Fred, and yours truly did today, is usually the people inside that church building and how those people treat me, and you, and one another.

Christopher Perry, a United Methodist minister in Alabama, in writing about his congregation says, "Robinson Springs UMC, where I currently serve is not overrun with resources. We do not have a large budget, a fancy children's area, or a worship center that will wow anyone (except with its history.) But the laity of the church 'get' that they can be the most welcoming church around . . . they help every person who comes through the doors to feel connected." [2]

That's the kind of community I think that Jesus wants all churches to be. The kind of community where people who walk through the doors are made to feel, not like a foreigner or even like a visitor, but like a guest, like a new part of the family stopping in for the morning. As Perry goes on to say, "You can be a Christian for three seconds and welcome someone. You can have a budget of \$0 and make people feel loved." [3] If the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids was really about ethics and living a Christian life, where I've taken it today, I think it points to the responsibility we have to help people who are cold and hungry, for whatever reason. And it's about the responsibility to go a step further, to make them feel welcome and loved.

We can look at those five foolish bridesmaids and say, "What a bunch of unprepared, undeserving women, what were they thinking?" Or we can realize that there may have been times when we have been them, that we didn't have enough oil to last the whole night through. And that instead of being punished for it and cast outside in the lonely, cold darkness, we were just waiting for someone to share some of that precious heat and light—to have their gift shared with us.

It's like someone once said, the age-old Christian strategy is to "gather the folks, break the bread, and tell the stories." What are the ways we can gather the folks in and make everyone welcome? What does it look like when we break bread together in a shared community meal as

the body of Christ? What stories will those of us who have been here for awhile tell to those of us who are new to Pilgrim Church? I can't wait to find out. Thanks be to God. Amen.

[1] Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 199.

[2] Christopher W. Perry, *The Church Mouse: Leadership Lessons from the Magic Kingdom*, xxiii.

[3] Christopher W. Perry, *The Church Mouse: Leadership Lessons from the Magic Kingdom*, xxiii

[4] Larry Rasmussen, "Shaping Communities" in *Practicing our Faith*, Dorthoy C. Bass, ed., 119.