

2023 11 12 – *Oil for our Lamps*

Scripture: Matthew 25:1-13 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

[A doctor inside Gaza's largest hospital says hundreds of patients are stranded, most operations suspended](#)

['They've got me': Father of Israeli woman taken hostage relives daughter's words as hope for peace fades](#)

[Child deliberately killed during gang-related shooting in Edmonton](#)

[Hillary Clinton compares Donald Trump to Adolf Hitler](#)

[COVID-19 outbreak at Victoria-area hospital](#)

These are just a few of yesterday's news headlines. They illustrate the fact we live in turbulent times, scary times. There are wars raging in our world, there are economic and political polarities that just seems to be growing farther and farther apart, there are viruses that continue to threaten our lives. I have had numerous people tell me that they have had to turn off or totally avoid the local and global news in order to stay emotionally, physically and even spiritually healthy over the past few weeks.

How do we stay connected to what's happening in our world, the pain and suffering that is occurring, and keep ourselves from going into overload and shutting down? What if the suffering is more personal and is happening within our own lives? How do we keep ourselves from just giving up? How do we live with the grief, the fear and the uncertainty? You could ask this same question using the terminology that I introduced last week: How do you stand in the tragic gap between reality and possibility without letting one side collapse into the other?

I believe the author of the gospel of Matthew was faced with a similar question. His faith community was living in difficult times. They were being persecuted for their beliefs and they were beginning to despair that the promise of Christ's Second Coming was never going to happen. This particular parable only occurs in the Gospel of Matthew. The author probably added this parable in his writings because he wanted to remind his community that there were things that they could do while they were waiting. There were things that they could do in midst of dark times.

There are things that we can do to. Just as the ten attendants (or bridesmaids) needed oil for their lamps, we too need oil for our lamps, our inner lamps. Our inner lamp is the source of light that is within each one of us. It is what helps us stay in tune with ourselves and with the world around us. And the oil in that lamp is the spiritual energy that we need for the light to glow and even to grow. The oil in that lamp is what we need to stay spiritually healthy in the midst of difficult times.

So how do we make sure that we have enough oil in our lamps? As we stand in the tragic gap, as we wait for peace to come to our world, as we wait for our leaders to heal the economic and political schisms that have formed, and as we face personal health and financial issues how do we keep our lamps filled?

Obviously, for those of us attending this service today, either in person or online, one of the ways we fill our lamps is by connecting with a faith community and building relationships within that community. Being in this worship space reminds

us that we are not alone. It reminds that there are others who are waiting with us, there are others who also need oil for their lamps. It reminds us that the God of Love has not abandoned us and that we can access the sacred energy of the Holy Mystery whenever we need it.

As I was preparing for today's reflection, I Googled spiritual health and found several lists of actions that we can take to keep a steady supply of oil in our lamps even in difficult times. The lists varied, but there were a few things that were consistent across them all.

One of those things was gratitude, having a regular practice of writing down or saying out loud those things for which we are grateful. They can be little things like a sunny day, a welcoming smile, a phone call, a kind neighbour or the technology that allows us to connect even when we are physically apart. I think this is one of the reasons why Sunday worship can be such an important part of our spiritual lives because during worship we give thanks and we praise God for the blessings that we receive.

Of course prayer or meditation is also a key part of spiritual health. In spoken prayer we say out loud those things that are weighing down our hearts, and even that act of giving over our concerns to God can help to alleviate some of the burden that we are carrying. Obviously prayer is a part of our weekly worship, but in times like these, it is good to also have a daily ritual that helps us connect with the sacred. That can come in the form of spoken prayer, silent meditation, walks in nature, art, yoga or dance. During the day even taking the time to

notice our breath and to take a few deliberate breaths, slowly in and out, can help us refuel so our light can burn a little brighter.

It may seem counter-intuitive, but one of the things that fills our lamps is helping others. Things like checking in our neighbour to make sure they are OK. Being part of a congregation opens many possibilities for helping. We can offer to help with a funeral lunch, join a committee, bake for the CMHA or organize a fundraiser. We can make small repairs in our building, volunteer in the garage sale, or offer pastoral care to others in our congregation. We can lead a book study, sing in the choir or offer our technical expertise. And, of course, we can also volunteer with other organizations within our community.

One of the things I do for my own spiritual health is that about every six weeks I meet with a counsellor and share what is happening in my life. We have been connecting on a regular basis for over ten years and have come to a place where we can do deep healing work over the phone. On occasion we have spent our session together releasing the grief that naturally builds up within me as I officiate at one funeral after another. Talking to a family member, a friend, or even a professional can make a huge difference in the level oil in our lamps.

Waiting is hard. There are many things wrong in this world that we cannot fix by ourselves. But if we keep our lamps lit, then we will be able to do the things that are possible like writing letters to political leaders, attending protests, or just making a difference in one other person's life. It is possible for Christ to show up within us.

We need to keep our lamps lit so that we are able to recognize the many ways that Christ is at work in our world. I went back to yesterday's headlines and here are just a few examples of Love in action:

[With a canoe ride down the Grand River in Ontario, these paddlers bring a 400-year-old treaty to life](#)

[His daughter was born in Gaza during the war. In Toronto, they finally met](#)

[Shania Twain thanks Indian Head, Sask., for hospitality — and pancakes — after crew bus crash](#)

[Australia offers to help South Pacific island residents escape rising seas](#)

We need to keep our lamps lit so that we can catch a glimpse of those times when Sacred Love enters our own lives. Those times when we are supported, healed and even transformed by the power of the Spirit.

May we all have oil in our lamps so that we see and be a part of the God of Love, the Prince of Peace at work in the world. May it be so. Amen.