

Waiting with anticipation and things taking so long you fall asleep. Regardless of your personal political flavor, there's a great likelihood that we may have experienced something in the last week that made you connect with today's parable.

Today we hear one another of the sorting parables in Matthew. These parables have been used and misused for centuries by people who choose to use them to hold power over others. These parables have that ability. After all, this is the second wedding parable in Matthew where people aren't allowed in to the great party but left out in the cold.

We all know what it is like not to be invited to something. To see people having fun and not be included is a horrible feeling. Not including people is one of the great powers we use on each other because most humans have a deep desire of belonging which is part of the story of this and other similar stories in Matthew.

BUT, I imagine you wouldn't be shocked to hear that we misuse this and similar moments in Matthew because we focus on who is included and who isn't. But that's not how this parable nor any of the sorting parables are written or work.

The bridesmaids in today's story are not horribly unlike bridesmaids today. (Thought I bet none of these were told that great lie "you'll wear it again, I promise.") They are a community, related, having similar interests and backgrounds. They are all human and they all end up tired and asleep because the groom arrives so late.

They had all come prepared for a normal schedule and things took FAR longer than anyone had planned (sound like something else we've been dealing with?) SO when the groom appears, not everyone has enough light to help show the way and thus we have the division of wise and foolish.

Many people have spent their lives trying to divine what the oil in the lamp symbolizes. What must we have enough of to be prepared when the Christ comes? Is it faith? Good works? What must we make sure we store up so we can be admitted into the wedding feast?

Well, perhaps it isn't about the oil. There is no one thing that I must stock up on and you must stock up on so that we can be ready when Christ comes. Unlike Bridesmaids in matching dresses, we are like the sheep and goats, or the weeds and the wheat, the net full of good and bad fish. We are a mix of people who have a variety of lamps and the light in those lamps is what we must focus on.

Just as Matthew is filled with these stories of sorting, it is also filled with lessons about light. "You are the light of the world" "A light is not put under a bushel" and perhaps the connection to this story, "Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and glorify God."

Just as we are at a time of the year where the sun is down early and the night long, we need light to lead us. We need light to give us warmth in the darkness, and we need light to offer direction and warmth to others.

In our lives we often go from living in the warmth of the sun to the cold of darkness. We have wonderful moments where we feel the world is on our side and other times when it feels like the whole world is running against us. We look at others and see their "perfect" lives, looking at them with longing for their perfection, without ever noticing that someone is often looking at us, in our same circumstances and thinking how fortunate we are, compared to them.

In those moments we are using our light, our God given opportunity to warmly love our neighbor, to focus on ourselves. To use our light to look at others and envy, rather than use that light to show a pathway of love that can lead them to warmth and caring.

Being a light for others is hard. It's tiring, and frankly, I don't want to do it some days. I want someone to hold the light for me, to do the work, to let me rest. Perhaps that's when I'm being one of the foolish people in this parable. Because I'm not using my light to help others, I'm using it for myself.

That's not why we were made. We exist in this world to bring love. If we are made in the image of God, then we must exist in the image of God. God is love, so therefore, so must we be. Of course, that's the challenge of being human with free will, we can chose not to be light for others. We can chose not to show the way to love or warmth to our neighbor who is wandering in the dark. And that is what makes us a foolish bridesmaid.

Choosing to be love in the world to the person who is poor, or homeless, or votes differently than we do means we understand that our Christian love, which is not our action, but the Holy Spirit working through us, that is what it means to have enough oil. It's easy to love the person who is with us, it is much harder to love the person the comes in the midst of the darkness. After all, that's when we find God.

Throughout the Gospels, when things are darkest. When it feels like hope is lost. That is when Christ appears. To the lowest at the lowest moments in their lives when they feel bound in the deepest darkness. Today that means us. We are the light of the world, shining so others can see God's love and work in the world.

Being among the wise means not being tired because I've loved enough today. Remembering that Jesus fed the five thousand just after he had found out that his cousin, John the Baptist, had been killed. Even when Christ was in the darkness, he knew that being the light for others meant being a light for himself.

In the parable today, we have to remember that the bridesmaids were tired. They had been asleep and I don't know about you, but I don't just hop up when I've been napping.