

Parable of the Bridesmaids – Lent 4

March 31, 2019

Matthew 25:1-13

Recently I saw a quote posted on Facebook. It was a reflection on the recent college admissions cheating scandal. It read: “As a parent, it’s my priority to get you into heaven, not Harvard.”

That quote triggered a little PTSD thing in me. I brought back a regret I’ve carried for years. I’d been talking with a woman who was, at that time, a member. We’d been talking about Sunday School and Christian Education. It was a pleasant conversation, although we had not agreed on everything. As she walked out the door the woman said, “After all, it’s our job to get our kids into heaven.”

I was stunned for a couple of seconds. Then I wanted to chase after her, but I knew she would already be gone. Do you know what I wanted to say? I wanted to say, “It’s Jesus’ job to get our kids into heaven. It’s our job to let them know he’s succeeded and there’s already a place for them there.”

The section our lesson today comes from in the Gospel of Matthew does a great job in making people wonder if we have a place in the heavenly kingdom. Jesus is about ready to enter Jerusalem and he knows he’ll be abandoned and rejected by everyone.

Chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew are full of warning about the end of this world. Jesus wants us to take a good look at everything around us and know it won’t last. And then he talks about the life beyond this one, the kingdom that will come. And then he leaves us with something to consider. Will we qualify?

The question in the lesson today is, “Do we have enough oil to keep our lamps burning? Are we prepared for the end of this world and the return of Jesus?” How do you feel about that? If your place in the wedding reception depends on your preparation and readiness, do you think you’ll get in? Uncomfortable, isn’t it?

But it’s a trick question. You see, it’s not up to us. Jesus has opened the doors of the kingdom for everyone. Jesus wants everyone to join him in the celebration to come.

If Jesus would have chosen to go to the cross for those who deserved his love and forgiveness, he would have changed his mind. None of us do! But he did it anyway. He suffered, died and was raised to give us life beyond this life as a gift, a gift of undeserved love.

And that's our oil. It's unlimited. We have enough oil for our lamps to last until Jesus comes again. Jesus had already told his followers, "You are the light of the world." We don't shine that light to prove we're worth a place in the kingdom. We shine the light of God's love because we have a place in his kingdom and we want that light to help the brightness of that kingdom to come here and now.

Jesus frees us from judgement. He also frees us from being judges. We don't need to judge whether people are worthy of God's love. We are called to share the good news of God's love.

We have another baptism today. Tessa is going to receive the promise that God has indeed chosen her to be his child. She has not earned it. Yet she'll be given the promise of the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. And there's good news for her parents. They don't have to get her into heaven. They do need to remind her that Jesus has prepared a place for her already and that she can live in his love and share his love until she gets there.

I've been tempted to contact the woman who made the comment about getting kids into heaven, but I've decided she probably wouldn't remember the conversation and might think I am a little crazy for bringing it up. But I do feel a little better telling you about it.

I hope you're clear on this. We have a place in God's love now and forever. We can't earn it. It's a gift. God does want us to respond to the gift. He wants us to respond by sharing his light, sharing his love, even with those who may not seem to deserve it. AMEN