

November 12, 2017 23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Amos 5:18-24, Psalm 70, Rev. 21:1-6

Gratitude and Generosity Team, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Matthew 25:1-13

[With textual ideas on Matthew from Rev. Joseph Crippen]

Grace and peace, dear people of Hope.

This is yet another parable from Matthew that may leave us shaking our heads, wondering,

“Where is that Good News?” “Where is that new life?”

You are not alone if hearing today’s gospel that was your first response!

Here at Hope we call our stewardship committee by another name: the Gratitude and Generosity Team.

Today as we receive and bless our pledge cards, our commitments to giving this coming year, the Gratitude and Generosity Team “teams” up with me for a dialogue sermon.

We got together to study the text and to write our shared sermon... and we shook our heads and wondered just these questions: “Where is that Good News?” “Where is that new life?”

And, then we wondered, with a fair bit of anxiety, how does this fit with giving!? With generosity?!

Let me offer some context for our readings today and then we’ll jump into some conversation.

Remember that this parable is the first of a set of three nestled in the midst of Holy Week Jerusalem.

Today’s asks: Are you prepared, ready, alert?

Then comes one asking, Are you using your talents, your gifts?

And finally, Are you seeing where I am? That’s the one where they ask the king, When did we see you hungry or thirsty, naked or in prison?

Remember that in the telling of the story, it’s Holy Week, and there’s some intense anxiety and disruption in the city.

And then remember that the writer of Matthew wrote years later, looking back on that intense time.

For Matthew and his community, there is likely similarly intense anxiety:

The temple has been destroyed and the society of Matthew’s time is divided, conflicted, it’s heavy, it’s weary, it’s weighed down. Sound familiar?

Gratitude and Generosity Team, could you share some of the worries and anxieties that you sense in our times? (in any order)

- **Beth:** North Korea, potential of war, rumors of war, the middle east.
- **Kathy:** increasing pollution due to ignoring standards, climate change.
- **Ann B:** Immigration, families being divided.
- **Ann W:** Declining health, worries about loved ones, loneliness, access to care, mental health concerns.

- **John:** Gun violence, mass shootings.
- **Eric:** Corruption, cascade of news about sexual abuse, abuse of power.
- **Beth:** Students facing stress, exams, student debt, finding jobs.
- **Kathy:** Fears of not having enough, financial concerns, getting older, saving for retirement.

Let's bounce back to the text again so I can offer just a bit more context:

Remember the arc of Matthew's Gospel: that beginning family tree that included outsiders and women!

The way Matthew values the small seeds: how we hear again and again Jesus welcoming, inviting, holding those with little faith.

The way at the cross it's an outsider, the centurion, who says, "This is truly the Son of God."

Jesus isn't done yet, and in Matthew that is strong: God isn't done yet. God is making all things news.

We so often hear today's gospel and imagine that big door crashing shut on those called foolish, but I wonder about a Bridegroom, a Savior, who stays with those who are left alone, those not prepared.

Maybe God is in both places and only really celebrates when everyone—all creation—is at the party.

Wedding parties back in that day were a big deal, a very big deal.

The banquet was large, community-oriented, everyone was invited.

When it was time, the attendants, the bridesmaids, would light the way accompanying the Bridegroom through the dark night to the banquet hall.

Our story today was about these bridesmaids and their preparations.

Could you reflect on these bridesmaids, and what this story brought up for you?

- **Beth:** This story is about being prepared, that's a comfort to me, we don't know. In our first reading of the story, it seemed like the ones with full lamps were closer to God, but then we thought about it more.
- **John:** We said why can't they share!? My passion is spiritual gifts and how we each share and contribute to the whole.
- **Kathy:** I think they are all kind of foolish, they could have turned down their lamps while they were dozing!
- **Ann B:** Sometimes the traditions we build even in our congregation create Insiders and outsiders

Our lives are about practicing. Practicing how we are to be and to act.

In his Letter from Birmingham Jail, Dr. King picks up on the words from our first reading from Amos, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Amos, and really, Dr. King, are critiquing the way our practice all-too-often gets hidden away.

So, How do you practice authentically living God's call?

How do you stay alert, engaged in these anxious time?

How do you participate in justice and righteousness that flows?

- **John:** I really focus on hospitality, that's how I respond to all of them.
- **Beth:** I stay alert by remembering God's promise: God takes care of us, gives us grace, provide enough for us, and not getting caught up in the anxiety and letting it overwhelm me
- **Ann W:** Each year as I give more, I find I have more to give, and then I give more, and I have more than enough.
- **Kathy:** An active prayer life on my own and with others.
- **Ann B:** Living authentically, I've gotten involved in justice work with ISAIAH, I'm stronger to speak out.
- **Ann W:** With just about every veteran I work with as a psychologist at the VA, I query their spiritual resources and I'm open to those conversations, some colleagues are not.
- **Beth:** By giving to the church to support our social justice programs, that's one way I participate in the flowing justice and righteousness. When I can't do it individually, it's part of what we do together.

We also heard the beautiful text from Revelation 21, the text from which our theme for Gratitude and Generosity arose, that promise, Behold, I am making all things new.

What do you visualize when you hear this scripture and imagine our world, our community of faith, and all things being made new?

- **Ann W.** Imagine: families and kids laughing and playing. Place where community can come and be together. I can picture the bread oven, college students hanging out, using it as their space.
- **Beth:** New members, outreach into the community, church as a good neighbor, welcoming place.
- **Kathy:** Caring about children in the community through Sheridan Story, children's play area.
- **Ann W:** What's new? Since my mom's death, my dad has become tender in a way that he's never been before-beautiful.
- **Ann B:** As a Sanctuary Congregation, we're working more closely with neighboring churches.
- **Eric:** We're a Sanctuary Church, and that is transformative, sets us down as people willing to live our faith at some risk.
- **John:** I went to the community panel last week ... We're very intentionally connecting with neighbors, police, others, listening closely so can be a part of this neighborhood.

Thank you, thanks to each of you.

God is making all things new. Amen!