

St. Andrew's UMC
November 9th, 2008
Matthew 25:1-13

“There Will Not Be Enough For You And For Us”

I want to share with you one of the Psalms that speaks for me:

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion , we were like those who dream. ² Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." ³ The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad. ⁴ Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb! ⁵ May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy! ⁶ He that goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

This is the Psalm 126, and the language points to Israel 's return from the servitude of 70 years in Babylon .

I am not really concerned with the accuracy of the historical context of this psalm; nor am I constrained by the interpretive limitation of the text: I can connect with the emotion of the psalm, and feel the joy of the people who are now home to worship their God. And I can feel that the text sings a song to which I can dance!

This election of 2008 has a lasting ring to it. A black man, whose father was from Kenya , whose mother was from the United States , is now elected the President of the United States . This is an exciting piece of news! This is an earthquake of the news! This is something that was only possible in a dream!

A black man declared many decades ago: “*I have a dream!*” He declared, “I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.’” And he further proclaimed, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

And that dream has come true just this past week, 45 long-years after that day! America finally made good on its promissory note, and it is only the beginning. And today we dream together for a different future of our nation. Not just the future in which “little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers,” but people of all colors can stand together in tears of joy, the joy of being many in one, and one out of many.

And this psalm, Psalm 133 speaks for me:

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! ² It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down upon the beard, upon the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! ³ It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion ! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life for evermore.

I am glad that I am living and witnessing in this momentous juncture of history. It is a privilege to be alive this day. May God command blessing upon this nation, life for evermore. Amen.

Our text today is the parable of Ten Bridesmaids. Jesus often used a parable to give sense to what he called the kingdom of Heaven. He was the first one who used the phrase, and it was an alien concept to the listeners. Jesus could not define what the kingdom of Heaven was, not because he was incapable of defining, but because it is the other-worldly thing, a spiritual thing that belongs to the godly realm. The human language was adequate only to supply the definitions to this-worldly things, and hence, those many parables about the kingdom of Heaven .

Here the parable points to the essence of wisdom as being prepared and not sharing the precious resources with others who are not prepared. Does this mean that we do not have to share or give to the poor and the needy? I wondered, because Jesus taught us to do good: **“He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise (Lk. 3:11).”** **“...do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return (Lk. 6:35).”**

Is Jesus contradicting himself here? I do not think that is the case. I think this is what Jesus is trying to teach us about the kingdom of Heaven: 1) the kingdom of Heaven requires us to get prepared to enter it; 2) there is a definite time set aside to enter it, and one must wait for it in vigil; and 3) there are some things that are not meant to be shared or broken up. It is the third aspect of the kingdom of Heaven I would like to meditate upon.

As far as staying up in vigil is concerned, one must have the required amount of oil to lit. Sharing the oil at this point with others who have no oil will fail everyone. The point is not the sharing aspect, but the diminishing aspect that is discouraged by the wise bridesmaids.

Instead of being wholesome and complete, the foolish five are totally lacking. Even if shared, their lamps can be no more than half full. We have the expression, "half-baked." A half-baked idea or a half-baked project is no good for anything. Borrowing at this point is not going to provide the sufficient amount for the required purpose. Lending is not going to help any one, but will make everyone unprepared.

What are the things that cannot be half-baked or cut in half? It is the righteousness that cannot be cut short, it is justice that cannot be half-baked. Righteousness and justice must remain wholesome. When we are talking about preparedness for the kingdom of God , we are talking about the complete, unabridged, and unadulterated preparedness.

Imagine: the radio and TV urged the residents to be prepared for the flooding situation from the hurricane. So you went and bought plywood and filled sandbags around your house. The neighbor did nothing, and watched TV all day. The water level rose and started to enter the garage. The wind picked up strength, and things are flying about. The neighbor knocks on your door, and tells you that you have to share half of the sandbags you set up around your house. Oh, he wants to borrow half of the plywood from your windows as well.

How about a court verdict? Can there be such a verdict as half-innocent, or half-guilty? The jury finds the defendant half-guilty. The

judge sentences you, therefore, to the half of the 15 to life behind bars. No, it will have to be guilty or not guilty.

When righteousness and justice are concerned, there can be no compromises. When the kingdom of Heaven is concerned, there can be no half-truths or half-entrances, or straddling the fences. One has to seek the wholesome righteousness and wholesome justice.

When we say all men are created equal, that does not mean that a certain race is more equal, or half-equal, to the other race. Yet it was only in a dream of a few visionaries that all men are created equal. How about men and woman? Are men and women created equal? Which gender is more equal or half equal to the other? How about the sexual orientations? Why should the people of a certain sexual orientation enjoy more rights than the people of the other orientation?

The nation dispensed half rights and half wage scales for the half-equal people. The nation used to feel that half-housing, and half-loans, half-stocked grocery shelves, half-financed school systems, and half-opportunities were good enough achievements for the half-equal persons.

We know these are just not acceptable. We know that is why certain people began to dream for the day, when everyone would be deemed equal, except by the differences of the character. No, there is only one kind of righteousness for everyone. There is only one kind of justice for all. Reducing righteousness and justice by half will not be enough for you and for us.

In the kingdom of Heaven , righteousness and justice must be upheld in the wholesome face-value. There are no shortcuts or discounts, and they can never be for sale. What we have witnessed at this election was made possible, because those who dreamed the dream gave that dream to the next generations who kept the dream alive and whole. It was the dream that yearned for righteousness and justice.

A contractor found a depression-era stash of cash in the wall. The house owner, who was friends with the contractor, did not want to share the loot. The contractor wanted 40%. The house owner said

10%. They went to court. Then the descendants of the original owner caught the wind of it. The contractor and the homeowner had to share the find with 21 other descendants, because they could not agree to share. Were they being wise, or foolish, for refusing to share? Are they still friends?

Material things can be divided or shared. A property can be divided. The treasure found in the wall can be divided. There are things in life, however, that must remain whole: one cannot serve God and mammon at once; one's loyalty to God must remain whole. One's devotion to the spouse must remain undivided. The lesson here is simple: share the material things, but keep the spiritual things whole. Righteousness and justice must remain whole, and they should never be pared down.

When divided, subtracted, or devalued, some things are bad for everyone. The kingdom of Heaven calls that these things stay whole, as God intended.