

SPIRITUAL REFUELING

11/8-20 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA [*Livestreamed*]

Proper 27 (A): Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16; Psalm 70; ~~1 Thessalonians 4:13-18~~; Matt 25:1-13

One of my decisions I deeply regret happened in the Party Supply aisle of the Dime Store back in my hometown. In my defense, I was only 10 years old, so my reasoning wasn't fully developed, but I absolutely knew what I was doing was wrong.

Having given me and my brother a whole dollar for our weekly allowance, Mom went to the clothing store down the street, while we each wandered on our own. I stood staring at a small package of what must have been cake decorations for an adult's birthday. I could see there was a teeny-tiny plastic baby doll and an itchy-bitsy champagne bottle, along with a bunch of other very miniature items; I wanted to touch them and inspect them up close.

The package was only 99 cents, so I could've easily afforded it, but what I really wanted to spend my money on was something for my Barbie dolls. In that moment I decided I could have both by stealing the party decor. Since I had no experience in thievery, however, I simply slid the package inside my jacket just like this.

And, because, I was so conspicuously stealing, a store clerk quickly confronted me, which led to a terrifying lecture by the owner, followed by a severe talking to by my mother. What was surprising to me is that Mom seemed to be way more loving and compassionate than she normally was.

I tell you that story, because we are given every indication that the foolish bridesmaids in this morning's parable—much like the man who refused to put on a wedding garment a few weeks ago—absolutely knew what was right and what was wrong. These bridesmaids were told ahead of time to prepare for the arrival of the bridegroom, but they decided not to refill their oil supplies. While the wise bridesmaids were refueling, these ladies ignored part of their duties.

As I've commented, while exploring other parables, it would be easy to stand in judgement of the foolish bridesmaids, but even the wise group fall asleep on their watch. None of us are without flaw; we all succumb to human nature. So, it appears that rather than being a warning story that if we don't get it right, we won't be accepted into the kingdom of God, this parable is a reminder.

The reminder is that whether the full reign of God comes about today, next week, next year, or in the next century, we need to be vigilant about regularly refueling our spiritual lamps. We refuel through worship, prayer and reading scripture. For some of us, refueling involves a walk in nature, being in community, or listening to special music. We don't have to be perfect; we simply need to keep reconnecting ourselves with God in rejuvenating ways.

After we've refueled, we're better prepared to live the life to which Christ calls us. We have more energy to serve our neighbors; it's easier to show kindness to strangers; and being refueled is probably the only way we'll ever be able to love our enemies. When we're refueled, we don't overlook what's right and wrong, rather we make wise—or at least wiser—decisions.

Which brings us to our reading from the Wisdom of Solomon, where we find wisdom personified as a female version of God. What we're told is that wisdom is elusive to those trying to get ahead or make ego-based decisions. However, for those prayerfully determining what's

wrong and what's right, we're told wisdom is "easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her."

And, just in case, we didn't fully register the refueling message in the parable, this Wisdom scripture reiterates that our relationship with God is one of mutuality. The passage states: "One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty." In other words, Wisdom, or the bridegroom, don't just show up ready to do it all for us. We have to show up having done our part: showing up ready to seek wisdom, and showing up having refueled our spiritual lamp.

Now, my mother may have acted compassionately the day of my failed heist, but she still held me responsible for my actions. I was grounded and went without allowance for several weeks, but, still, like God, she forgave me and showed me that I was still loved—despite my flaws.

As we move through these tumultuous, post-election times; in the midst of pandemic restrictions with not everyone following the safety guidelines we've adopted; when tempers are short because you're sharing space with each other's virtual office and your kids' online classrooms, we will be held accountable by our family and friends for our mis-steps. But we will all make better decisions if we seek wisdom and refuel our connection to God on a daily basis. God is here among us, within us, and ready to refuel us.

-AMEN

Collect of the Day

O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Wisdom 6:12–16

Wisdom is radiant and unfading,
and she is easily discerned by those who love her,
and is found by those who seek her.
She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her.
One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty,
for she will be found sitting at the gate.
To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding,
and one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care,
because she goes about seeking those worthy of her,
and she graciously appears to them in their paths,
and meets them in every thought.

Psalm 70

1 Be pleased, O God, to deliver me; *
O LORD, make haste to help me.

- 2 Let those who seek my life be ashamed
and altogether dismayed; *
let those who take pleasure in my misfortune
draw back and be disgraced.
- 3 Let those who say to me "Aha!" and gloat over me turn back, *
because they are ashamed.
- 4 Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; *
let those who love your salvation say for ever,
"Great is the LORD!"
- 5 But as for me, I am poor and needy; *
come to me speedily, O God.
- 6 You are my helper and my deliverer; *
O LORD, do not tarry.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Matthew 25:1-13

²⁵"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' ⁷Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' ¹⁰And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹²But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' ¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.