

Tending God's Light

November 9 • 2008

Focus Scripture

Matthew 25:1–13

Additional Scriptures

Joshua 24:1–3a, 14–25

Psalms 78:1–7

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Grant us, O God, life in the light of faith, that we may be enlightened within and bright and lively beacons without, that we may give illuminating and truthful witness to the brilliance of your grace and justice. This is our choice. Amen.

Those who bear the light of Christ are called to give constant attention to tending the source of this light within. God's Spirit is the life given to each disciple. As we wait for the fulfillment of God's reign, we are to tend to the things that sustain and nurture our faith, and tend to the ministry and service to which God calls us.

Focus Scripture: Matthew 25:1–13

Matthew 25 includes two parables about the coming of God's realm in its fullness. Parables are wisdom stories. Jesus' parables challenged the disciples to consider matters of faith through well-known, everyday experiences or cultural practices. Jesus' parables gave wise responses to this question of early Christian communities: How shall we live in God's reign in relationship with God and one another?

In engaging Jesus' parable in these verses, it is helpful to know that tradition required the bridegroom to arrive at the home of the bride's family, claim the bride, and take her to his own house. The bridesmaids waited at the groom's house, ready to welcome the couple and celebrate their new beginning.

Waiting for the bridegroom meant being prepared, not merely passing time. In this parable, some bridesmaids neglected their oil lamps. A trimmed wick ensured maximum light and minimum smoke. Having lamps that once burned well did not mean that they would burn well again. Constant attention to the lamps ensured the light would be available when required.

In Bible times, oil was associated with anointing and indicated the presence of God's Spirit with a person. Oil also was a metaphor for God's presence, displayed in one's compassion and acts of love and mercy.

The gospel of Matthew strives to keep the community of disciples grounded in Christ. The parable speaks to being ready whenever God's reign comes in its fullness. God's life is birthed in each person. Each person is responsible to tend the light of God's life within – one person cannot pass her or his inner spiritual strength to another. Jesus' parable speaks to God's desire for relationships with disciples that have continuing life and consequence.

An untended life of faith runs the risk of smothering the God-given flame within. Disciples can be seduced by religious "highs," particular teachings, even ministry and service. The life of faith is dimmed through inattention. Tending to our faith – having trimmed wicks and plenty of oil – means attending to the practices of faith that form and grow us into the faith of Christ.

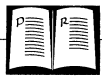
Matthew's reference to judgment in verse 10 may appear moralistic to modern readers. Experiencing God's compassion seems a more effective motivation to attend to the practices of Christian faith.

While we engage in the ministry and service to which God has called us, we must also tend the things that sustain and nurture our faith. Joshua, as described in **Joshua 24:1–3a, 14–25**, could not choose for others to follow God. To follow God meant living in relationship with God according to the covenant, and each Israelite needed to choose to do so. **Psalms 78:1–7** lays out the importance of passing on past learning to future generations.

Paul's friends tended the light of their faith, but some died during persecution. In **1 Thessalonians 4:13–18**, Paul's hope in God's grace imagines them continuing in community with Christ, in God's eternal presence.



Jesus' parable invites us to prepare for full participation in God's reign. Such preparation and participation – tending God's light – is grounded in our faith. What Christian practices nourish and sustain your faith? What is the basis for your hope as you live in Christ, now and in the time to come?



Replacement biblical background page for **Lutheran, Episcopal, and Anglican** congregations using the **paired reading** stream of the Revised Common Lectionary is on the Congregational Life Paired Reading CD.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access *Spirit Sightings* for connections between current events and the focus passage.

