

32nd Sunday OT A

Where is there light in your life and the world today? And where is there darkness in your life and the world today?

What do you see when you look into the lamp of your life? Is it full of oil, running out, or empty? Is the oil fresh or has it become rancid? Is your lamp burning brightly or is it growing dim?

Light or darkness, full or empty lamps, and fresh or bad oil are not about what is happening around us, the circumstances of our life and world, but about what is happening within us. They are metaphors for our spiritual condition, our inner way of being.

It would be so easy to divide and categorize the ten bridesmaids into two groups – the wise and foolish, the prepared and unprepared, the good and bad, the winners and losers, the welcomed and rejected. Often that's what we do to ourselves and each other.

To divide and categorize the ten bridesmaids, however, is to forget, ignore, or misunderstand what today's gospel says.

All ten bridesmaids were a part of the kingdom. All ten were invited to the wedding banquet. All ten went to meet the bridegroom. All ten became drowsy and fell asleep. All ten had lamps. All ten were meant, intended, and called to be carriers of the light. The only difference is that some carried light and others did not. And that is true for every one of us.

We also are meant to be carriers of light. **“You are the light of the world,”** Jesus says earlier in Matthew’s account of the gospel. **“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”** To withhold our light is to add darkness to the world.

Every day we either add to the light of the world or add to its darkness. I know that because I have seen it in my own life. Maybe you have seen it in your life too.

When I break relationships; turn away from the needs, concerns, or hopes of another; or act as if I do not need him or her; my world becomes darker. And when I remain open and receptive, soften my heart, and recommit to love my neighbor as myself, a new light begins to shine.

When I carry grudges and resentments, nurse old offenses, or refuse another forgiveness, I add to the darkness. But when I offer mercy, and forgiveness, and seek reconciliation, I let my light shine in the world.

When, relationships, I put myself at the center, act as if I am sovereign, and give priority to my needs and desires, I am living in a dark place. But when my concern is for the other, I make him or her a priority in my life, and I act as if he or she truly matters, I add to the light of the world.

When I think, speak, or act with violence; deny another’s dignity; or act with indifference to another’s well-being, I darken this world. But

when I turn the other cheek, work for justice, and recognize the dignity of every human being, I add to the light of the world.

When I get stuck in my way as the right way or the only way, assume I know more and better than others, and close myself to new truths, ideas, or possibilities, I stand in the darkness of my own making. But when I recognize my need for others; let go of comparisons, competition, and judgments; and risk not being in control or having all the answers I begin to see the world in a new light, and new possibilities arise.

What do you see when you look at your life and world today? When I look at my life and world today, I see light. And when I look at my life and world today, I see darkness. I suspect that's true for you as well. None of us are all light or all darkness. We are all a mixture of both. Some days I add light to the world and other days I add darkness.

I don't think the question is whether there is darkness today in our life and world. There is. The question is this: What are you doing about it? What am I doing about it?

Every time I live in that dark place, every time I add darkness to the world, I betray the gospel of Jesus, myself, and the values I claim to hold. And when I do, I must justify that betrayal. I blame, criticize, and refuse to look at myself. It is someone else's fault. They got what they deserved. I didn't do anything wrong.

And in that moment, I no longer knew myself. I am no longer the light carrier I want to be or that God created me to be. No wonder Jesus says to the five bridesmaids, **“I do not know you.”** He is speaking to the darkened part of each of our lives. It is not so much a rejection as it is a call to discover the light within us, a call to let our light shine.

What does that mean and look like for you today? How is your oil level? And if you are a quart low, what are you doing about that? What is going on in the lamp of your life?

The world needs your light. There is not a person or a place in our world today that does not need light. Your light makes a difference. You can push back the darkness with your light of love, hope, healing, forgiveness, gentleness, and compassion. The light of Christ is already within you. **“You are the light of the world.”**

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Let's leave this place today, face our darkness, and shine our light. For it is God who said, **“Let light shine out of darkness.” Amen.**