

Sermon November 8th, 2020

God's Promise of Healing and Restoration Will Happen Eventually!

Many people gather around Jesus to hear what he has to say next. They are exhausted from all their suffering. Hanging on by a thread. Needing Jesus to be the real deal.

They are desperate to hear a message that brings them hope. They are desperate to be lifted up from their poverty. They are desperate to heal from their sickness (**Image**). They are desperate to experience justice from their oppression (**Image**). They are desperate to see their lives and their community restored.

In response to the crowds needs, Jesus shares with them a parable about hanging in there. Encouraging them to stay patient. To prepare themselves for the long wait. To gather enough oil to keep their light burning (**Image**). Not exactly what we want to hear when we are longing for change.

For Luther, the oil Jesus is talking about in this parable is the people's faith. Jesus is encouraging the people to find enough energy and support to stay faithful. So, that their hope in Christ's healing and restoration will not burn out.

When Matthew shares this parable of Jesus with the people in his Christian community Matthew is trying to encourage the people to cling to these words of Jesus, as they face persecution from their neighbors, their families, and the Empire. As they continue to wrestle with illness and poverty. Even after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension.

From the perspective of those who followed Jesus, they expected that things would change when the Messiah came and did his thing. Yet, they are still struggling. They have not seen the fullness of God's healing and restoration in their lives. Only glimpses of this healing splattered upon their canvas of life.

Matthew is encouraging his community to gather up enough oil to keep their hope burning until they see Jesus return to heal and restore them from all their suffering. Or as Luther argues, find ways to nurture their faith so they can endure through these suffering times that seem to be dragging on and on and on.

As we walk through this pandemic together, we can relate to the early believers. Many of us are suffering through this pandemic, whether it is experiencing a job loss, or dealing with our anguishing mental health (**Image**), or grieving some of the things we can no longer do (**Image**), or feeling lonely and isolated from those we love, or having to say goodbye to a loved one who has died from COVID. We are all experiencing suffering during this pandemic, and it feels like it is dragging on and on and on.

We hear this parable today and we empathize with the early followers of Jesus. We are desperate to hear a hopeful message. We long to experience Jesus' healing and restoration in our lives and in our community.

For some of us, we are starting to run out of oil. Our light is starting to dim (**Image**). We hear Matthew. We hear Jesus. Encouraging us to gather up enough oil. To seek out supports to help us stay faithful during this time. Keeping our light going. And yet, we ask ourselves, "How do I stay faithful Jesus when things seem to be getting worse? Why don't you just come back and make everything right already?"

This pandemic has taken over our lives for the moment. But, even in normal times, we have come across this question when facing suffering that seems to drag on and on and on. I think of those of you who have walked with a loved one through their suffering from cancer. Sometimes, this fight can last a long time leaving you feeling exhausted, looking around for more oil to keep your light burning (**Image**). To keep your hope up. To hope in healing whatever that may look like. To hope in God's comforting presence. So, you can find the strength to wake up the next morning and sit with your loved one again. Being there for them no matter how hard it is. As you think back on that time, how often did you find yourself asking the question "How did I stay faithful during this time of suffering that seemed to drag on and on and on?"

For some of us, as we enter darker days, we see the toll these long winters take on our mental health. Depression can be a darkness in our lives that seems to drag on and on and on. It can be hard for us to keep our light burning. For those of you who have recovery stories of depression does this question speak to you now, "How did I stay faithful during this time of suffering that seemed to drag on and on and on?"

One answer to this question is looking back on how we did it before. As we go through this pandemic together, we go through it as people who have suffered before. We can look back to our past to see where we found support. We can look back to our past to see where God worked to heal and restore us.

We have not experienced this healing and restoration in fullness, because Jesus has not returned to do this work. But Jesus left us with the Holy Spirit that reveals glimpses of this healing and restoration throughout our lives. Whenever we suffer.

Reconnecting with our past stories is a way for us to gather up more oil. To find the faith we need to keep our hope burning bright. To be encouraged by this hope to reveal this promise of God's healing and restoration to others.

Reconnecting to stories in our bible helps us see where God's healing and restoration was at work for the Israelites, the prophets, the disciples, the apostles, the early Christians. We see through their stories that God does come into our lives, healing and restoring us, so we can continue to reveal the love of Christ to others. So, we can continue to be God's hands and feet in our world.

Reconnecting to each other whether it is in person or through some virtual means or through a phone call gives us more oil for our lamps.

Relationships are significant for our healing and restoration (**Image**). When we have people walking with us our faith feels stronger. When we feel like we are supported by those we love we seem to dig deeper to get through the tough times.

For the early church, community was vital for their survival. They strengthened each others faith by supporting one another in a common mission. To share the good news of Jesus Christ. Or in other words, to reveal Christ's love to those they encountered. When they were persecuted, they comforted one another. When one struggled to get by, the others helped them get back on their feet again. When one was sick, the others offered what they could to help heal them.

Prayer is another way that we find faith to keep our hope burning bright (**Image**). When we pray, we often feel a connection to our Creator. We feel

like we are not alone as we deal with our suffering. That somehow God is there in God's own way. It might not always be the way we want or expect. But we know God is there.

Then there is the power that gathering as a church, whether virtually or in person does to help our faith grow. Listening to the Word and experiencing the Sacrament more often than not gives us a lift. Helps us see God's presence, and reconnects us to our calling as God's children.

I have often seen people who are down and out feel rejuvenated or comforted or strengthened in their faith when taking Holy Communion during struggling times.

God has given us so many tools to reach out for when face suffering in our lives to keep our light burning bright **(Image)**.

And so, as we continue to walk through this pandemic together. As we face suffering in our lives, may we reconnect with those memories and practices that reveal to us God's promise of healing and restoration. May our eyes be opened to see this healing and restoration taking place in our lives. Even if it is in small increments. And may we continue to cling to our faith keeping our light burning **(Image)**. Believing that God's healing and restoration in its fullness will come to us. Eventually!

Let us pray, gracious God, we give thanks that you give us support through so many means during times of suffering in our lives. As we walk through this pandemic give us what we need to endure. Give us what we need to keep our lamps full of oil. So, that our hope in your promises do not fade, but lift us up. Helping us continue to be the church in your pandemic world. Revealing your promise of healing and restoration to all we encounter.

Amen.

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