

Amos 5:18-24

Psalm 70

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13

Sermon November 12th, 2023

We Are Not Alone!

In our gospel, Jesus sees the heaviness the disciples are feeling in taking up this invitation to follow Jesus. They have had to make some major changes in their lives to be fully engaged in this ministry. Like, walking away from their careers. They have faced some consequences along the way. For example, some of their loved ones have walked away from them because of these changes. They have faced persecution from the authorities as well as their neighbours. They have had to enter into some uncomfortable situations at times as they live out the radical hospitality Jesus is preaching and living out. The disciples are carrying with them a heavy weight on their shoulders (**Image One**: someone sagging their shoulders, looking like they are carrying the weight of the world).

In response to their feelings of heaviness, of struggle, Jesus shares with them a parable to encourage them to keep the faith. To encourage them to keep the light in their lamps burning. To encourage them to keep enough oil on hand in case their light starts to flicker, their faith starts to weaken.

Like the disciples, sometimes we need to hear this parable, as we feel the heaviness that comes with being a disciple of Jesus in this time and place (**Image One**). For example, walking through the process of making major changes in our church to reach out to people in our community. Walking away from some of those things in the church we have found comfort in. Or, bearing the weight of a history where we, the church, have at times, alienated and harmed people. We are doing a lot of apologizing today for the harms we have caused people past and present. This has to weigh on us (**Image One**). Or, sharing our faith with people in a world where people are listening less. It gets exhausting when we feel like our voice is being ignored all the time. Or, giving up certain things that our neighbours get to enjoy, so to, give of our money, and of our time to support the ministries in the church. Or, dealing with persecution for standing with the marginalized groups in our communities. Like the disciples, we can feel the weight of the church on our shoulders (**Image One**).

In response to our feelings of heaviness, of struggle, Jesus shares with us this parable to encourage us to keep the faith. To encourage us to keep the light in our lamps burning. To encourage us to keep enough oil on hand in case our light starts to flicker, our faith starts to weaken.

Well, as I hear this parable, I can't help but reflect on the oil we need, to keep our light burning. Or in other words, the things we need from God to keep our faith going during these times of heaviness, of struggle. For example, I think about the times in our worship where we participate in a thanksgiving of baptism. To help us remember the gift of the Holy Spirit that we receive in our baptism. The gift that reassures us that we are not alone when trying to live out this invitation to follow Jesus. We are not alone when making these major changes in our churches to reach out to people in our community (**Image Two**: Two people together). We are not alone when walking with people, who we have hurt, through a truth and reconciliation process. We are not alone when feeling the sting of rejection when our words about the love of Christ are landing on deaf ears. We are not alone when making sacrifices to live out the generosity Christ invites us to live out. We are not alone when standing up for what is just and fair.

We are not alone, because through the Holy Spirit, God walks with us, working in and through us to breathe new life in our community (**Image Two**).

As well, we are not alone, because through worship, through Bible Study, through prayer, through service for others, we feel, we see God's presence in our lives, and in our community. We feel, we see, that God is working in and through us to be Christ's hands and feet in the world.

And, we are not alone, because we are part of a community of believers who are walking together into this new way of being church (**Image Two**). Who are walking together in this truth and reconciliation process. Who are walking together as we share this story in our neighbourhoods. Who are walking together in living out this invitation to be generous in everything we do in and for the church. Who are standing together with the marginalized people, supporting each other as we face the persecution that comes our way. We are not alone (**Image Two**).

And so, as we face the struggles of being the church today. As we feel the heaviness that comes with being a follower of Jesus (**Image One**). May we hear Jesus' encouraging words to us. "You have enough oil to keep your light burning. Remember. You are not alone (**Image Two**). Through your baptism, the Spirit dwells within you. The Holy Scriptures are where I speak to you. The worship is where I gather with you. The prayers are where I listen to you. The people you serve is where I am present with you. The community is where you will find support and inspiration to be the people, I created you to be."

Let us pray, gracious God, when we feel the heaviness of being your disciples. When we feel like we have nothing left to give. When our faith is weakened. Turn us to your parable. Help us hear your encouraging words to keep the faith. Help us see all those

things you do in our lives that help us keep our light burning. That keep us following you. **Amen.**

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