

“Oil For Our Lamps”

What is an enemy? An enemy is someone who tries to hurt us, our body, our belongings, our family, and our friends-- in short, anything that brings us happiness.

The true enemy, therefore, is malice.

The 14th Dalai Lama

Little did I know that when Amy left home for her first day of kindergarten she would do battle in her mind's eye with malice of the scariest kind. Little did I know that while standing at the bus stop street corner a big vulture would start circling round and round and round overhead while she and her sister waited for their ride. And little did I know that, instead of offering comforting words of motherly assurance to calm her fears, her older sister would say: 'That's a chicken hawk who wants to eat you for breakfast!'

Truth be told, I knew little about separation anxiety when my children were growing up. All I knew were security blanket tantrums, refusals to sleep without a nightlight, spider nightmares, waking up to find my four year old sleeping on the floor beside my bed because I wouldn't let him sleep in mine, and inglorious empty nest syndrome. I also didn't know that there was a positive side to this negative growing up -- separation stuff. I didn't know that playing peek-a-boo helped my babies internalize a smiling parent who would show up to transform abandonment fears. I didn't know that when they tucked away siblings, aunts and uncles, friends, teachers, preachers, coaches, and loved ones in the recesses of their heart that an inner peace of companionship calmed their minds. Furthermore, I didn't know that faith's internalization of the saving Presence of God and the peace of Christ could give them strength for fighting the enemy of malice with Holy Love.

Separation anxiety is a modern term for an age old disruption of inner peace. When it comes to faith, the Bible tells us that the Jews experienced separation anxiety within the soul of their community whenever they felt the absence of God. For the disciples of Jesus it surfaced big time after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. For many years they dealt with the

loss of their teacher by gathering together after observing the Sabbath to renew their Last Super covenantal promises, to tell their stories of doing good works in Jesus name, to enjoy the presence of the Risen Jesus, and to wait for Christ's victorious return. Each gift of comfort, ray of hope, touch of healing, boost of courage, and freedom of forgiveness that they received during their prayerful meeting served to renew their trust in a loving God and to birth the Living Christ in their mind's eye. For years these spiritual practices gave Jews in the Jesus movement the inner peace they needed to practice Christ's kind of self giving/do no harm/sacrificial Love. Perhaps it was due to the dynamic reality that in both the halls of their minds and in the streets of the city the non-anxious Christ was powerfully alive and ever-present. After Rome crushed the Jewish rebellion and destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. however, that peace of Christ began to fade. By 85 A.D. Matthew's tiny Jewish sect had fallen under serious threat from empire powers of violence and systemic injustices. Vulnerable souls feared being devoured by the encircling chicken hawk of malicious evil. They started losing faith when it appeared that practicing forgiveness, doing no harm, and loving one's enemies was ineffective in disarming malice. To make matters worse, Christ had not yet returned victoriously as the Risen Jesus had promised to bring in God's reign of Peace. Rev. Arland Hultgren wrote: 'Being a peacemaker for a day is not as demanding as being a peacemaker year after year when the hostility breaks out again and again. . . It is necessary to plan for the long haul, remain faithful, be wise, and stay strong.' (The Lectionary Commentary) For times such as this, Matthew recorded Jesus' parable of the 'Ten Young Women' to help peacemakers endure in faith.

Matthew 25:1-13

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but, the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of

your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But 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.' And 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. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.'

In his book, *The Art of Parables*, Rev. Charles McColough offered some insight into the dynamic of the wise and foolish women's choices.

Like the Foolish Women we can reject the offer, and there are consequences for doing so, but they are not punishments, they are the self chosen consequences of our choices. The five young women who have prepared for the way of goodness---by doing active deeds of goodness---get to celebrate and let their light shine. The five young women who are not prepared for the way of goodness are not punished, but they do face the consequences. They do not get to celebrate. That is all. Their judgment is self-chosen.

By using the fear of exclusion to emphasize the need for vigilance in doing good works (symbolized by keeping oil in the lamps) and the joy of inclusion for increasing alertness and readiness, Jesus eases our separation anxiety and disarms our fear with Love's joy.

No one is exempt from losing faith in the battle with malice when separation anxiety plays havoc with our inner peace of mind. That's why in faith's wiser moments we teach our children to sing:

*Give me oil in my lamp, keep it burning
Give me oil in my lamp I pray
Give me oil in my lamp, keep it burning, burning, burning,
Keep it burning till the break of day.*

Our All Saints/Souls Service is today at noontime. It is faith's time for remembering loved ones who have died yet remain within us as loving companions on our life's journey. It is sacred time for enjoying the Peace of Christ which passes all our understanding.