

The Fallow Way

“Tending Light”

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14, 16-17, 23-24; Matthew
25:1-13; Romans 12:1a,2
November 8, 2020

After Joshua:

Sorta' makes you wonder about our false Gods and how we say we would never worship them but often find ourselves doing just that, despite the covenants we make with ourselves and God.

I wonder if we unconsciously worship the very things that end up exhausting us.

Before Matthew:

Matthew changed from Mark's "Kingdom of God", to "Kingdom of Heaven" ...it is because he knew his audience to be mostly those Jewish and the Jews did not say YAHWEH's name out loud...not because Jesus is focusing us on heaven as a reward, with hell as a threat, he is not! The Kingdom of God is here and now!

Focus on this life here and now! This parable is not a metaphor for making it to heaven but a call to us here and now...it's asking us:

Are we prepared? And for what?
Are you hoping to be rescued?
Do we even recognize ourselves anymore?

Theme:

As fall fades and the cusp of winter is near, we now enter a fallow time...in mother nature and, thank you Lord, in our human nature as well.

In nature, the fields lay fallow. Meaning, not planted and then covered by the snow. That snow contains the very nitrogen the soil needs for new life to grow. And so the plant roots actively continue to grow, imbibe the richness of the soil...

made possible in fallowness.

And this bears fruit! Literally, in the right timing: spring.

The Fallow Way in our human nature is a time when God invites us to enter into God's ways of enriching ourselves with holy rest and holy restoration...taking in what we most need now...knowing this bears much fruit in our right timing, too...

a conscious time restoring and preparing us as internal seasons of winter and, so then, spring come.

Much goes on beneath this quieted surface. There is a difference between "not doing anything" and "doing no-thing".

When we embrace the Fallow Way, there is precious work unfolding beneath the surface of things with real consequence.

Rumi says:

Don't think the garden loses its ecstasy in winter. It's quiet, but the roots are down there riotous.

The Fallow Way is a seemingly quiet, riotous way through our loss and grief, exhaustion or exhilaration.

A Holy rest within God's tender care that restores.

We lean into the mystery of what lies just beneath the surface
of our lives preparing us for growth.

So let me ask you:

What is it in your life that so longs for rest? is most tired, weary?

What within you longs to be restored? ...that is just beneath the surface of your daily routine and awareness.

Lean into the mystery. Trust. Your roots grow deep.
Lean into the Fallow Way.

Prompting:

Again, given today's passages, another way to say this is:
what is it within you that needs tending?

What is the light needed in your life so you can see
who you deeply "be" and where you are going?

How you "tend the light" may make all the difference in a day,
and in your life!

And we know...oh darn!

Each person is responsible to tend the light of God's love within themselves (trimming the wick of routine and schedule and emotional demands and having your own supply of oil on hand).

No one can pass her or his inner spiritual strength/courage/rest/light to another...even if asked,
even if they want to.

Believe me, I've tried! Haven't you?

Each one must be prepared, tend to their own light.

Jesus' parable speaks to God's desire for relationship with us, a relationship that prepares us for continuing life in all its fullness.

This parable points to the reality that for every choice we make, there is a consequence...don't be caught off guard.

Now there are some problematic commentators find in playing out today's parable in Matthew, using it as a metaphor.

Namely, all its pieces do not come together to create a whole indicative of the "God" Jesus teaches and so parts of it are hard to hear and don't at first add up. (This is the only gospel that includes this particular lesson.)

For instance, we have been taught to share, live by the golden rule ...to live in abundance ...so the wise bridesmaids not sharing is a piece that doesn't quite fit...

although we know "rescuing" never really helps someone,
it just postpones what may be inevitable
unless they begin to do things differently.

And, Jesus teaches God never shuts anyone out, never gives up on anyone...so why the door doesn't open even if they've come late and a dollar's worth of oil short, doesn't quite fit either...

except to say that when we don't act in ways that reflect the light of Christ within, we may not be recognizable to others,
perhaps even to ourselves. And so, we shut ourselves out...down.

Here's the thing:

An un-intended/un-attended life of faith especially runs the risk of growing dim when times are tough. If we feel the God-given flame within going out, seek some rest and restoration.

Lest we begin to lose our sense of self. Our integrity. Our right place in the world around us. Become co-dependent, and so, very vulnerable to the whim of others and fickle ways of the world.

The life of faith dims through taking things and others for granted; when expecting more of others than we do of ourselves;
when exhaustion and grief set in.

When we...

are seduced by religious or political "highs" or "lows",
let alone careers, busy schedules, justifications, materialism, laziness disguised as
boredom...other Gods as Joshua might say.
Hey, are you sure you're not worshipping
that which actually exhausts you?

Those in Joshua quickly responded saying when he brought worshipping false gods to their attention: "Oh, we know better. WE wouldn't do that." Yet, they and we often do anyways!

It takes more than words or good intentions.
How you take care of yourself matters.

You can't play both ends against the middle, burn the candle from both ends. You can't fool God even if you can fool yourself!

You have to say what you mean and mean what you say.
Don't just keep on keeping on, lest you be shut out, shut down. Tend the light.

And it sure helps to have a few witnesses who will hold us...accountable in the best of ways...let's say, hold our actions and choices into the light and reflect them back to us so we tend that light within.

A covenant of sorts with us for our own good and the greater good.

Sorta' like when Dick years ago shared with me that I seemed grumpy and then suggested I take some time away if over-tired/worked. How kind of him to witness to me, hold me accountable to myself! Hold me into the light so I could attend to things most needed now. Go fallow.

Be a witness when someone makes an off comment or joke and instead of letting it go, we speak up. When someone says one thing but then does the opposite. When someone succumbs to the easy vs the authentic.

And how to respond to such a witness?
How do we find that oil that lights the way?

We are invited to tend to the light of our faith
so our faith will tend us.

Implored to...

Trim our wicks (to do lists) and have plenty of oil on hand.
(Oil a symbol of God's presence with us as reflected in its use in anointing.)

Oil: consciously spending our time in life giving ways, taking rest, being prayerful. You know, sleep is a prayer, gentle music a prayer, tears a prayer, a walk a prayer.

We are implored to...

Stay within God's presence and trim our wicks...cut out what isn't life giving...tend to the light, our faith: daily not just on Sundays, or those feel good/wedding days.

Lean into the fallow way...a quiet time to recover and to prepare for harsh times and new growth ahead.

Fallow ways working below the surface that tend the light:
~having your own but intentional version of a prayer life,

- ~taking time to be self-reflective and aware perhaps speaking with your pastor or a spiritual director,
- ~learning more about God and Jesus and spirit and faith...reading or taking a Living Water class or retreat,
- ~seeing your body as a temple and caring for it/yourself the way the Divine Lover of Your Life would have you be cared for,
- ~taking faith and moving it out of words to action,
- ~choosing and coming to a time of worshipfulness that works for you.

These things are everything. These are the Fallow Way.

And when we lean into these ways, we realize that just beneath the surface of life God is tending to our next new life.

As we go quiet, seemingly doing nothing, our roots are nourished as they go deep ...preparing us through winter for spring!

Ah, the ecstasy of winter...the hope for what ails you.

This newly rooted life steps you away from denial: steps you back from burn out, steps you toward self-honesty and awareness.

And, it needs *your* tending in order to grow...you will need to tend the light in order to grow into the next season of your being.

Joshua and Jesus make it clear. There is a seriousness in these texts that asks us to take ultimate responsibility for our actions...
all year round!

We are invited to some fairly straightforward self-examination.

And the first question I might ask myself is:

“WHEN do I plan to prepare myself for the holy realm
I keep asking God to reveal?”

Since the only time any of us has is NOW,
now would seem to be the right time.

No one can help me get started, prepare, but me.

And then maybe the next question I ask myself is:

“Do I seek to live in sustainable ways, making the most of the resources I already have within
me and taking the rest I need?”

Or do I feel entitled...that others should meet my needs”

As we proclaim the good news that God is tending to us, regardless of the size of our oil flask, or the preparedness of our wicks, or our motivation or staying power...

as we proclaim God cares, we realize each one begins from a different experience base lest we judge others. We each act according to our need now, this week's experience.

So, let us be aware...

Some of us are experiencing heart break or hopelessness or fear. Some may have been part of a death or a birth this week.

Some may have lost a job or been hired after a long time of unemployment.

Some may be in a honeymoon time or taking a few minutes of respite from caring for a partner or parent.

I cannot, we cannot, know the wounds or joys that inhabit every heart, the grief and loss or exhaustion or exhilaration...know the thing most needed now,

Any individual's true need for the rest and restoration of fallow time,

but I trust you will/we will know that we are all in this together, held together in the great heart of the Holy One.

And so we are counting on you to:

ask for the help you need in tending your light.

None of us can read your mind or know the circumstances of your week if you do not share them.

So...

Don't just go away, hide away, don't go away mad.

Don't just drift away or stay away or slip away

Open up and we can help each other tend the light.

We have a covenant of care with each other...despite all that has or is happening, we care. Let us care.

Let yourself care about...you!

We are invited to the wedding of heaven and earth, fear and joy, grief and hope. But you have to show up.

Be prepared. Tend to the light.

Take the Rest you need for this is holy. Restoration is holy.

Receive holy rest and be restored.

Learn to love the fallow way.