

How Bright Is Your Lamp? – Luke 12: 35-40

Actions speak louder than words, or as Luke's Jesus says, *faithfulness demands diligence.*
(Matt Skinner, *Commentary on Luke 12: 32-40, workingpreacher.org*)

The verse, *Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit* tells us that the waiting described is one of energy and action. The servants had to stay alert in order to keep their lamps lit. They could not slack off or the lamps would burn out.

In the same way, it takes attentiveness to keep our lamps lit. Maintaining a meaningful relationship with God is no different than our other significant and meaningful relationships. It involves doing as well as being. Personal piety, worship, study, prayer and reflection, as well as social holiness, that is acts of good works, and stewardship of our time, talents, witness and financial resources. All of which tells us that waiting on God is active waiting.

As I said a few weeks ago, God is not passive or indifferent. God is always present, desiring to engage with us, in ways we recognize and expect, and in ways we have yet to discover. We won't discover or recognize this, unless we too are engaged; unless we, like the servants, keep our lamps lit. This is the first message in today's scripture...

The second is this. God moving in our lives is not as predictable as we think, or want, or expect it to be. God is full of surprises. Wonderful, generous, grace-filled surprises, but in order to recognize them, we must stay alert & open.

In today's story Jesus describes a Master who shocks his servants. The servants expect to serve their Master, that is their job, their responsibility, so the servants stay alert so that when the Master returns, they can tend to his needs. But what happens? The Master unexpectedly *fastens his belt and has the servants sit down to eat while he serves them.* Those servants who fell asleep or were not attentive missed out. They missed the surprise and gift of being served.

A third message is the reminder that in God's realm or kin-dom, worldly status and possessions do not define one's worthiness. Being a part of God's realm means serving others, including those society would say are beneath us. The reversal of supposed roles between Master and servant remind us that in God's realm all are worthy regardless of worldly standing.

This means that true discipleship goes beyond acts of charity, because discipleship is more than transactional interactions. Discipleship is relational, whose outcome is affirmation of all involved. The Master serves his servants not as a one-time act of generosity or charity. He serves them not for his own amusement or pleasure. Nor is the goal of his actions for his servants to see him as a nice guy, who throws his employees a bone. It is an action which affirms that the Master knows that while the world sees servants through one set of eyes, he sees them through God's eyes. He sees them as persons of value and worth, no more or less than he. In serving them, he affirms them as children of God. What a radical understanding that all too often is not and never will be embraced by our world, until or unless we remain open, alert, watchful, expectant, attentive and humble.

Humility is a big part of all of this, so too, is a willingness to admit when we have for whatever reason become insensitive or indifferent.

I led our last Midnight Run on July 30. I took with me friends who have heard me talk about Midnight Runs but had never experienced one. As I said about a month ago, these folks were excited and curious about doing the Run. They are also strong Type 'A' personalities who focus on getting the job done. I told them that getting the job done, while important, was secondary to their

experience. I emphasized the importance of interacting and conversing with our friends on the street. Then I told them a story I have told before.

Several years ago, I was doing a Winter Run. The weather was miserable, bitter cold and damp. I was a little less than enthusiastic about being there.

As the driver, my role was to drive and then at each stop, hand out from the side of the van, socks, underwear, toiletries and blankets. There was a lull in the activity, so I decided to jump into the driver's seat to check out where the next stop was. In truth, I went into the van to warm up. I was sitting in the driver's seat looking at the stop list when a knock came on the window. I rolled down the window, and a man said, 'I know it is cold and I don't mean to bother you, but I was wondering if I could have a blanket? As I jumped out of the van to help, I thought, 'Eric remember why you are here!' I think of that night and how dim my lamp was, every time I go on a Run.

I don't think we are in the habit of equating faithfulness with diligence. I am not even sure how often we actively wait on God. Instead, as faithful people we tend to do what we do, and although often the things we do are good, generous and kind. Sometimes our lamps can get pretty dim. Other times, they go completely out.

Today's passage is a call to acknowledge this, and reflect on how it can be different, by asking:

How willing are we to rely less on what we know or think we know about God?

*How willing are we to see the wisdom in relying more on what God has yet to reveal to us,
as individuals and as a community of faith?*

*How willing are we to acknowledge that it's not just about what we know,
it's also about what we have yet to discover about serving and being served?*

It is one thing to talk about being open, alert and diligent. It's another to live into being open, alert and diligent. Living into being open and alert requires keeping our lamps lit, not some of the time, but all the time.

How brightly is your lamp burning?