



SAINT JAMES'
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Fremont, California

SERMON

9. November, 2008. Pentecost 26
Title: "Let It Shine . . . Let It Shine"
Text: St. Matthew 25:1-13

J.J.

KID'S KORNER OUTLINE

- What's this? (Candle)
- What are candles used for? (Birthdays, Parties, Celebrations)
- Can you imagine a time when the only light we had at night would have been candles? No light bulbs, no street lights, no flashlights, no nightlights . . . just darkness . . . kinda scary, huh?
- In those days, candles were very important . . . and not just for parties and celebrations, but for every day use.
- Look around . . . we use lots of candles in Church . . . but what do they mean?
 1. Christ Candle (Baptismal Candle)
 2. Candles on the altar (festive meal—seder)
 3. Gospel candles (carried in procession)
 4. Sanctuary lamp
 5. Votive candles
- Candlelight can be very important (especially, when there's no other light source). Even one little candle can point out the way we are to go.
- Children's song: "This Little Light of Mine" [written by Harry Dixon Loes (1895-1965)]

This little light of mine,
I'm going to let it shine.
This little light of mine,
I'm going to let it shine.
This little light of mine,
I'm going to let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Put it under a bushel, no
I'm going to let it shine.
Put it under a bushel, no
I'm going to let it shine.
Put it under a bushel, no
I'm going to let it shine
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

All around the neighborhood
I'm going to let it shine.
All around the neighborhood
I'm going to let it shine.
All around the neighborhood
I'm going to let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.



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Today's Gospel is familiar to most of us – the Parable of the Ten Virgins, or the ten bridesmaids (depending upon your translation). It's a parable full of meaning; one that can be, and has been, interpreted in many different ways.

Some look at this parable as talking about the "end time," that is, when Jesus shall return to judge the living and the dead . . . and there's good reason for that: this 25th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, as well as the chapter just before it, focuses on such things as the "Signs of the End of the Age," "The Coming of the Son of Man," and "the Last Judgment" (when the sheep shall be separated from the goats, remember?), along with the warning to "keep awake . . . for you know neither the day nor the hour" . . . a sermon that I myself have preached more than once, and a theme that is behind that great hymn we will sing at the Offertory: "Wake, Awake for Night is Flying."

Others, however, look at this parable and focus on the wedding party . . . on the five bridesmaids who were wise and five who were foolish . . . on the five who came prepared, and those who did not. Such sermons usually end up admonishing us all to be prepared (as if the preacher were addressing a Boy Scout rally—"Be Prepared!") . . . and I suppose there's some validity to that kind of interpretation.

Not long ago, I heard a sermon on this text where the preacher took the side of the foolish bridesmaids, pointing out that one never can really know exactly how to prepare and how much oil, for example would be enough for a long night's stay . . . and the sermon sort of scolded the five wise bridesmaids or not sharing their "wealth," encouraging us, the hearers, to be generous in our sharing . . . and I must say, the preacher had a point.

The problem I have with all of those interpretations is that they all seem to focus on the future (the sweet by-and-by, or the day of judgment and end time), rather than on the here and now, and, as an Episcopalian, I have some difficulty with that kind of interpretation. To be sure, it's important for us to look ahead and to plan ahead—I'm all in favor of that . . . but in doing so, one can not ignore what God might be calling us to be and to do in the here and now. As I was pondering those thoughts, suddenly my attention was drawn, not to the ten bridesmaids or the coming bridegroom . . . no, but to the lamps and to the light, for they represent the here and now . . . they signify what's really important for the moment. It was dark out there . . . as I said to the children, back in those days there were no street lights . . . no electricity . . . there may not even have been a moon that night . . . imagine it, everything pitch black that night, except for those ten (or maybe more) lamps, lighting the pathway for the coming of the bridegroom (and I have to believe it was for the bride as well—for the bride and groom) . . . ten little lights, lighting the path to the wedding party . . . ten little lights pointing the direction for the great celebration . . . ten little lights showing the way to that gala event and to a wonderful new day. Oh yes . . . Let it shine! . . . let it shine! . . . that's what's important . . . Let it shine! . . . let it shine!

And those words are important for us to hear, we who are here at St. James. Yes, it is important for us to keep awake and to watch and to pray during this interim time as

we prepare and plan for St. James' future and get ready for the coming of our new Rector. It will be important for us during this time to discover our abundance and our gifts, and to share "our oil" (if you will) with one another. But most important, is to keep the lamps burning brightly for ourselves, for one another, for this parish, and for our community . . . to be the people that God has called us to be . . . to be witnesses of the Good News . . . to celebrate our joy in the Gospel. That will not always be easy. There are going to be times when we're not always going to agree with one another on what needs to be done or how we are going to accomplish all of the tasks that lie ahead. There will be times when it will seem very dark, not only out there, but also in here. I can promise you that. But it's at times like that, we will want to keep the lamps burning brightly . . . to shine with one another . . . to be a light for one another. Oh yes . . . Let it shine! . . . let it shine!

This little light of mine,
I'm going to let it shine.
This little light of mine,
I'm going to let it shine.
This little light of mine,
I'm going to let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

All around the neighborhood
I'm going to let it shine.
All around the neighborhood
I'm going to let it shine.
All around the neighborhood
I'm going to let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

And right here at St. James Church
I'm going to let it shine.
And right here at St. James Church
I'm going to let it shine.
And right here at St. James Church
I'm going to let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Oh yes . . . Let it shine! . . . let it shine!

S.D.G.

The Rev. Dr. David E. Abernethy-Deppe
Castro Valley, California