

“God, That Would Have Been Enough”

Matthew 25:1-13

(The young women wondered how much is enough oil?)

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Which tendency do you have? After a ballgame do you comment on how good the offense was, recalling how they have improved over the past few weeks, or do you name how much better the defense could be in the next game if they would just do such and such? If you are old enough to remember when the Berlin wall fell, or if you are too young to remember that, when something equally miraculous happens today, did you exclaim how marvelous that families could re-unite, or would you list the 20 other walls that divide people on earth and pray really really hard that resolution would come to those walled-off peoples around the earth, real soon?

Today we have a scripture passage in which young women are supposed to be expectant and to be alert in their waiting for the fulfillment of more Divine Good. We also are going to focus upon a song that is sung by many Jewish families at the Seder ritual, during Passover, when they look back over history and remember blessings, and give thanks for those blessings.

Both ways of being--looking forward toward more Divine Good actually happening on earth and looking backward, to remember and to be very grateful--are spiritual ways of being. And interestingly, both deal with the idea of "enough." On the one hand, we say, "This is not good enough--to have 2/3 of the world at peace or to have 75% of world population eating healthfully. It will not be good enough until there is genuine peace and genuine sharing of resources so all are in peace and all can eat. On the other hand, we say, "Thank you God for our blessings. Life is good. What we have would have been enough, but God you have offered even more!"

The next few weeks, during Advent, as we expect once again Jesus' birth, we'll aim in the hopeful direction, looking forward. Today, Thanksgiving Week-End let us permit ourselves to dwell on gratitude for what is and has been.

A half a dozen times or so John and I have been honored to be invited to friends' homes for a Seder meal. A Seder meal is part of the Passover celebration in Jewish homes. Usually Passover is around the time Christians celebrate Easter.

The year before we moved to Redlands, we were so honored, and at that Seder I had a wonderful flashback to my childhood. We who sat around the dinner table, as we followed the *Haggada*, the ritual, came to a point when we sang, "Da, da, yenu....." I felt as if I were in elementary school, for that's where I learned this song. I was raised in the San Fernando Valley, and we grew up learning a good deal about Judaism. Well, at least we learned Jewish songs, like this round, "Dayenu!" (Once you sing it a number of times, it tends to hum inside you forever.)

It was not until the year before last, however, that I learned that "Dayenu!" means—"God, that would have been enough!"

Sanctuary Choir teaches “Dayenu” Song. All sing.

If Dayenu, even now that you have learned this song, is difficult to recall, you can think of it as meaning “All else is icing on the cake!”

I can just imagine a rabbi saying to the congregation, “As gratitude for what is and what has been, let us all respond, ‘God, this is icing on the cake!’”

Did you know that there are people who study gratitude? I'm *grateful* that there are such researchers, like Robert A Emmons, a professor of psychology at U C Davis, who studies happiness.

He explains, "Basically, gratitude is about remembering." He names an "old proverb that says: 'When you drink from the stream, remember the source.'"

In this case, Jewish families remember how good God has been to them in the past. Then, families keep giving thanks for more and more blessings.

Professor Emmons explains, "Gratitude is a choice that doesn't come easy [easily]. It has to be practiced. . . You can't just wake up and say, 'I'm going to be grateful today.'" Singing Dayenu during the Sedar is part of that practice.

In the spirit of "Dayenu," let us recall times when we have been grateful, then something *else* good happened.

I will go first. I have had time to think of examples. However, you think, too. (I'm not going to ask you to share, so relax.)

1. My first example happened 6 years ago, but truthfully, the memory still nourishes me. In the mid-west, there is a tradition of having an Open House when students graduate from High School. The two weeks around graduation time, parents and students call each other to coordinate all the various open houses. I remember vividly our Open House for our son—the foods, the people, the enjoyment. When I went to bed that night, I felt very good and that we as parents were appreciated. What I experienced could easily have been translated into "God, That Would Have Been Enough." However, the next morning, when our son came downstairs, he came right over to me and said, "Mom, thank you for the party." Whew. That was icing on the cake!

(1 ½) 30 years ago I baptized a young girl. That was a blessing. That would have been enough. Dayenu! However, yesterday I had the privilege of officiating at her wedding!

2. My next example is a contemporary one. John and I were happy in Orange County; actually we were happy in Dayton, Ohio, too. And, we had been plenty happy in San Diego before Dayton. I'm grateful to have gotten to know quite a number of good places to live. "God, thank you." However, even though all the other places would have been enough, God has led us to Redlands. This place is "icing on our cake!"

Do you get the idea? We can be very happy, content, deeply grateful for what is, for what happens, for what we have, then, there is even more. Even more. We find ourselves expressing, "God, that's more than we could have hoped for." We could collectively name all the musicians of this church: organists, pianists, flutists, vocalists, guitarists, harpists, armonica player, and we could exclaim to God, "This is so wonderful. This would be enough! Yet, almost every week I'm here I learn about one of *you in the pew* who is a great singer or new members join the choir who are organists. Now our new youth director is a musician, too. We can indeed exclaim, collectively, regarding our musical blessings, "Dayenu!"

I challenge you to come up with precise situations in which you are so grateful for your "more than enough" blessings.

We've focused on the kind of "enough" spirituality that looks at what is or what has been and say, "God, *that* would have been enough! This is way more than enough!" Now let us peek at the spirituality approach that looks at the present and says, "This is not enough. Divine Good can be much more expressed on this earth."

The parable that Nic read is told only in the Gospel of Matthew. These ten young women have been given descriptions, in most of our bible translations, as either “wise” or “foolish” –in fact the parable is often called the “Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins.”

This is a very peculiar, even incomprehensible parable in which Christ is the groom--though that may not be very apparent to us readers.

We do not really know the marriage customs in first century Palestine. In this vignette, we do not learn anything about the bride. Yet, for some reason we are told that many bridesmaids are waiting up for the groom, who, for some odd reason will be arriving at midnight. Even more peculiar is the idea that shops would be open to sell lamp oil at that time of night—remember there were no 7-11’s in that day.

I used to have a hard time calling the young women “wise” who went to get more oil, because they did not seem wise not to share their oil with the other women. It seemed to me that solidarity with each other would be an indication of wisdom. However, I learned that this parable provides a fun math problem. It is assumed that if the five with enough oil would have given oil to those five who ran out, then all would have run out, just at a later time than the five so-called foolish young women ran out. I do, however, think they could have found a better way. Even 4th graders in "Math Olympics" could figure out there are other solutions. For example, half of them could have used their lamps, while the others saved their oil. Then those who saved oil could light their lamps. That is, they could have cooperated! It's true, that's not the point of this parable.

Even though in our Bibles, and in many sermons no doubt, five of the women get a bad rap, the gospel writer, Matthew himself ends up depicting all ten of these women in a positive “light.” They are lighting the way for God to enter the world, so to speak. They are all dedicating their lives to Jesus—the one for whom they are waiting. They were not waiting for Jesus to be *born*, remember. Remember Jesus is the one telling this parable. They are waiting for what some consider Jesus’ “return,” but what we might think of as a time when humanity fully “marries” Jesus’ message, that is, when no one needs to say, about their food, "This is not enough." There would be much less poverty, much more cooperation.

The bridesmaids in Jesus’ parable looked *forward* in time. What was not enough. They were expecting more; open to a true Kingdom of God on earth. That’s very spiritual. Whereas, the Jewish ritual at Passover looks *backward* in time. It looks back, *remembers*, and is genuinely grateful. Tat’s spiritual too.

Just a couple minutes ago we probably thought of quite a few ways we were content more than content, grateful. Yet, before we worship together again next Sunday there will be the official opening of the Christmas Shopping Season. It may be difficult for us to sustain the sense that we have this Thanksgiving: “God, this is enough.”

It s not simple, but it is profound. We do have two simultaneous spiritual goals: One, to not accept the status quo as good enough, to be expectant, to be watchful and ready to help the greatest Divine Good to enter fully into the world... and Two, to have deep gratitude for what is and what has been and to exclaim thankfully that it is more than enough, “Dayenu.”

An Inuit (Eskimo) proverb sums up both spiritual goals: “May you have warmth in your igloo, oil in your lamp, and peace in your heart.”