

‘Are You Ready?’  
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based on Matthew 25:1-13 and Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25

A movie came out in 1992 called ‘Leap of Faith’ starring Steve Martin and Debra Winger.

Steve Martin portrays a fake faith healer named, Jonas Nightingale, who gets stranded in a small town the bus breaks down carrying his circus-like entourage of revival-like showmen. While their bus is being repaired Jonas decides to go ahead and hold a revival in the small town ... never wanting to pass up a chance to make some money.

Jonas describes himself as “a twelve-gauge, double-barreled, grenade-launcher of LOVE!”

A signature song in the movie is Patti LaBelle’s ‘Are you ready for a miracle?’  
I ask you today: Are you ready ... for a miracle?

Let us pray:

Awesome and loving God, we seek your special blessing this day as we recommit ourselves to living into our namesake: our covenant with you and with one another. Keep us ever mindful of the choice we made when we said, “Yes! We will follow you.” Amen.

In last week’s study guide I asked you to read all four of the scripture readings and pick which one was the basis for Covenant’s namesake. It was the Joshua passage.

In the mid 1970’s (just before Bill Reeder’s tenure) three churches came together to form a covenant and make a deliberate choice to serve the Lord faithfully and with integrity. That is how we got the name Covenant. We entered into a faithful relationship with Spencer-Ripley Methodist Episcopal Church ... Calvary Evangelical United Brethren ... and Monroe Methodist Episcopal Church AND we entered into a faithful relationship with God.

We have strived to live into that covenant agreement ever since.

A covenant is a promise ... an agreement that is bound by trust and entered into reverently with gratitude for the past and hope for the future.

Before a covenant can be formed the parties involved must make a choice ... a decision for which they are primarily responsible, but enhanced by others who are there to love and support one another into a quest of faithfulness.

Joshua must have known a covenant with God is not a solitary decision ... nor is it to be taken lightly. Joshua offered the tribes of Israel a choice: serve the Lord your God ... or serve foreign gods.

But beware! Once you choose you must remain faithful. If you choose God, you must incline your hearts to God and God alone.

The people agree and a covenant, formed with the people of all the tribes of Israel.

As scripture tells us throughout the entire Old Testament narrative, they strived to live into that covenant. For good or for ill ... in weakness and in strength ... for richer or poorer ... in sickness and in health ... they worked at living into the Covenant. Some

persevered ... some got lazy.

Years ago, a woman from the Fairport church took a trip to the Holy Land and came back with an oil lamp ... we imagined it to be similar to the lamps held by the ten bridesmaids.

The thing is ... it was small! It would fit in the palm of your hand. So if you were low on oil you'd know it! It would be obvious.

Jesus' parable of the ten bridesmaids; five who had an adequate amount of oil and five who clearly did not have enough. Five were prepared for when the bridegroom arrived ... and five were lacking.

Being low on oil couldn't have surprised the five who were lacking ... therefore it is hard to conclude those five bridesmaids, who did not have enough oil, were nothing but lazy!?

Not wanting to pass judgment (since judgment is not ours to pass) but I have a hard time being generous with laziness.

Therefore I would conclude the parable wasn't about oil at all! It wasn't even about bridesmaids. It was about whether or not a God-believer and Jesus-follower was willing to work hard in order to be prepared for the coming Day of Judgment.

When we would reconcile our lives with the stipulations of the new covenant: to love God and to love one another.

This God-believer and Jesus-follower had a choice to make.

God, after all, gifts us with the freedom to choose. Supposedly a God-believer *could* put off working hard for another day ... or ... they could live each day striving for the time when loving God and loving neighbors became the norm and the days of selfishness and unloving attitudes no longer ruled the hearts and souls of humanity.

Yesterday at Bill Reeder's celebration of life service we talked about how Bill was like the Man of LaMancha whose quest in life was to right unrightable wrongs, and try even with arms that are weary; to run where the brave dare not go; and to fight the unbeatable foe...

Those weren't the kind of quests in life that can be accomplished if you're low on oil.

Those quests require constant tending and soul searching and a willingness to forego selfish desires and the temptation to wallow in unloving thoughts.

Everyone has a choice whether or not to follow Jesus.

But if we say we choose Christ ... then our lives become one long quest for the impossible dream.

If Bill Reeder taught me nothing else ... it was that the unreachable and impossible was reachable and possible with God.

What does it mean for us to choose to be faithful? Because the consequence of our choice isn't often immediately known ... the choice then becomes a product of our integrity.

Faithfulness is the result of integrity.

We want to believe cheaters are not faithful. Liars are not faithful. Unloving folks are not faithful.

But if we truly believe faithfulness is a result of integrity ... then we have to believe salvation is by grace ... and no matter our level of faithfulness ... God welcomes the sinner.

As a matter of fact, you could almost say that to remain consistently faithful always and forever with no backsliding or little white lies ... that would be would be a miracle!

Both readings today compel us to be ready, and to be faithful, and to choose God.

Are we ready to be faithful to our covenant with God and with one another?

In part, it means we must be ready for a miracle. And that miracle is when Jesus will come and welcome us into the wedding banquet ... or the kingdom ... or whatever biblical metaphor makes sense to you.

The miracle is when we have attained the unattainable and are prepared when the unreachable star comes within grasp.

It means we do not know when or how ... but we trust in Jesus' promise that he will never leave us orphaned and he will come again.

When so much is going on in the world that leads us to believe foreign gods and spiritual warfare has been declared on the new covenant ... it is imperative, now more than ever, to remain faithful and trust in God's promise.

Are you ready?

Then let us say, "...as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."??

Thanks be to God. Amen.