

For God's Guiding Light, take extra Oil! ... In these times, oh do we need some "light from above!" God bless America (please)... "Stand beside us and guide us, through the night with a Light from above!" Regardless of who won the elections, there is so much work to be done, as the elections show us to still be a country very divided, polarized. It has been said often and is true that people are losing friends over politics, family members are not talking with each other. Divisions are very real, walls go up everywhere, and violence is not far away. Yes, God help us, God bless us, shed some light and grace upon us, please! Help us to find "better angels" of our nature (Shakespeare in *Othello*, and President Lincoln on the eve of the Civil War).

One key symbol for our country is the Statue of Liberty, with the oft quoted words, "give me your tired, give me your poor," etc. It is a symbol of the BEST of America, a place of welcome, a place to be free, to exercise your religion or your culture. Yet we know we have not lived up to our ideals as so many have not been welcomed over the years, every wave of immigrants experienced exclusion and prejudice, not to mention those who were brought here in chains. "With liberty and justice for all" (pledge of allegiance) may be our ideal, but we fall so short.

We turn to God, through words of Holy Scripture, and through the words of great leaders. With regards to JUSTICE, the prophets have some of the most memorable words, especially these words from Amos: "Let justice roll down like waters!" We can imagine an everflowing stream or river, even waterfalls, that just keep coming. We also hear the words of a recent prophet, Martin Luther King Jr, "the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice." We hear the words of the United Church of Christ: Our mission is to "live the love and justice of Jesus." It is a never ending task so we pray to let the waters of justice keep rolling down, keep making our country and our world "more" just... to live into that vision of our Constitution that "all (men) are created equal" ... not literally true since some have many more gifts... but equal

in the sense of inherent value as a “child of God,” equal opportunities, equal treatment, treated with the same respect and justice. Jesus of course goes further, to LOVE every neighbor, even enemies. President Lincoln spoke of restoring bonds of affection across the divide between north and south: *We are not enemies, but friends...we must not break our bonds of affection...the mystic chords of memory...will yet swell the chorus of Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.*

Moving on to Jesus' teaching about the 5 wise and 5 foolish bridesmaids... One of the lessons I get from Jesus' story is one on realism: It's about a heavenly banquet, and there are plenty of people who don't get it and don't experience it, maybe even 50%! (5 foolish maidens) Now before the mind jumps to politics, let's remember a story can have deeper meanings for each individual soul, so there is a part of each of us that is foolish, that won't bother with preparing for the future, and won't invest in extra “oil” for a long night. Yes, the foolish maidens did not invest in reserve oil, and there are practical things we need to save, even stock up, for a rainy day, or a Covid stay-home day, and for the long winter coming up. But the deeper spiritual meaning of OIL in the Bible, and surely in Jesus' mind, are things like the “oil of gladness” or the oil of spiritual anointing, or the oil of healing. Surely our nation now needs plenty of healing oil, even extra oil to get us through a dark night of warring politics.

A crucial lesson I see in Jesus' story is that we all have CHOICE., to be like the foolish maidens, or to be wise and find our place at heavenly banquets. Again, regardless of political persuasion, our task, as followers of Jesus, is to have the goals of love and peace with justice.... Or repeating the wisdom of our founders: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness... all good things! Every human wants these “inalienable rights.” So I think it is obvious that peace does not come easily, but necessarily involves fair treatment for all (justice). And

especially listening to the voices of those who feel unfairly treated.... Nowadays that means listening to voices that cry out "Me too," or cry out "I can't breathe." No action, no listening, saying status quo if fine is also a choice, a choice not to invest in oil and light for God's heavenly banquet, which is always a from of COMMUNITY. (...and "crown thy good with brotherhood" says our song, referring to true "community.")

Attending a heavenly banquet, or not, is always a CHOICE and we need oil for the long night and the long haul. We can exclude ourselves from community by harboring fear or hatred, or we can participate in the ways of inclusion. We can fear the "other" who is different, or we can do the work of "Building Bridges" to almost any "other." We can wrongly see ourselves as all peace and niceness, or we can make friends with our shadow side, and say "there but for grace go I." We are all a mixture of good and bad, and which way we go, as Native American wisdom tells us, depends on which urges or tendencies we "feed." We can feed inner hatred, or we can nurture our potential to love. We can hide behind lies, or we can tell the truth. We can hold resentments and place guilt, or we can open our hearts with forgiveness. We can learn and choose power plays, the ways of domination, or we can choose the ways of collaboration, cooperation, compromise and peacemaking. We can invest in real oil, spiritual oil... we can invest our time, our treasure and our talents. We can share them as light and warmth for a heavenly banquet, which makes a place at the table for everyone! (and these holidays we will all search creatively for ways to include everyone!)

Songs help us keep important ideas in our heads. "Building Bridges" is one of those ideas, a spiritual "oil" for times of fear and strife. We build bridges through LOVE, love for God, for self, for neighbor, for enemy, for all Creation. It is a common Christian theme, one we used in our capital campaign for our bridge between the buildings and our bridge to the greater community. The theme first impressed itself on me at a missions retreat at Lake Winnepesaukee.

Beautiful gathering of people of diverse color, diverse cultures, and diverse Theology and Christology! But the common ground was surely LOVE; It was a great gathering with great spirit, the spirit of true community and communion. But they could have used theme song! So I wrote one in my car on my trip home, stopping to make notes. It has been used by some regional church meetings since then. Here is my version of bridge building, a spirit always needed, especially now for newly elected leaders, and for our relations with other world leaders.

### “BUILDING BRIDGES” by Ross Varney

CHORUS: Building Bridges, moving forward,  
Always on the road to peace.

Loving spirit is uniting,  
Bridge of peace from you to me.

1. Love will be our teacher, love will lead the way.  
Both in joy and sorrow, love is here today.

CHORUS

2. First you were a stranger, now you are a friend.  
Any fear is cast out, love wins in the end.

CHORUS

3. Though there may be danger, a river deep below.  
With your hand and with God's help, we can cross  
I know! CHORUS