

25 “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4 The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

6 “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

7 “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

9 “‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

10 “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

11 “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’

12 “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’

13 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Sleep Well

It’s almost Thanksgiving. That exciting time of the year when family gathers together under one roof to share a meal. But it’s not as if Thanksgiving just happens. There are days, hours, maybe even weeks of preparation to get to this Superbowl of Food. You want to be prepared and you want to be ready. With so many people anything could happen. You could burn the turkey, run out of pumpkin pie or worse yet toilet paper. That’s when the sudden realization hits you that you’ve run out at the most inconvenient time.

And yet that’s not the worst possible thing to run out of? Jesus is not the gas guzzling American but his parable leads us to believe that oil is the most precious substance. But what does the oil represent? Commentators are divided even going so far as to state the oil of which Jesus speaks can be anything you want it to be. Which is troubling right? The one thing you don’t want to run out of, is also difficult to define and know what it is.

If running out of oil leads to being locked out forever, you'd want to make sure that you had a sufficient supply so the lights don't go out. We'd all be out stockpiling, hoarding, whatever that oil is be it pumpkin pie or toilet paper. We want to be certain of our access into the feast. Whether or not we know what the oil is **Jesus' parable teaches that what we believe will influence how we wait for his return.** Either we sleep securely knowing all is ready or we frantically make last minute preparations when we come to the realization that we've run out at the most inconvenient time. You can sleep, and sleep well because our readiness depends on his work, his preparation, and has been made already.

But sleeping may not be the one thing you want to do especially before a big event like Thanksgiving or even a wedding. It's not as if weddings come spontaneously or unannounced. In Jesus' time Weddings were well planned and prepared. They weren't much different from our weddings. Here in our Western world we focus on the bride. It becomes her special day and the groom is present but often seen as an inconvenient but necessary part of preparations. The reason why a wedding has become her day is probably because of the tradition of the bride's parents paying for the wedding. At Jesus' time, the groom paid and the ceremony starts at her place where she is placed on the back of an animal, and the groom with his friends form a disorganized, parade taking the longest route back to his house, wandering through the streets so the city may celebrate his joy, his wife.

Back at his house the crowd waits. And here our parable starts with ten young women invited to the feast, possibly family or even bridesmaids. None of them knew how long it would take for the groom to arrive. He could deviate from the course and or get sidetracked at a house. Either way there is a **delay**. The women wait. They all fall asleep. At midnight the cry goes out, "Here comes the groom." They are all surprised. Five have oil. Five brought none. Only five are prepared. The rest are clueless as to how lamps work and Jesus gives us the first dumb blond joke on record.

They ask the wise ones to share oil but then there won't be enough for either of them. What's worse having five lights and still being able to see or all of them being in the dark. They storm off to beg, borrow, or buy a little bit of oil. Everyone knows everyone so finding oil at midnight is not a problem. But by the time they return the door is shut and they make more demands, "*Open the door.*" Due to their poor planning they demand oil and even an open door. They are locked out and met with, "*I don't know you.*" They are locked out because they ran out at the most inconvenient time.

Jesus is describing the kingdom of heaven. *"The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom."* This is the church not the world. That means the wise and foolish reside within the church. Exactly where one would expect them to be. All were invited and planned to participate. All came. All waited. All fell asleep. All were surprised. The only thing that was different was the fact that only a handful brought batteries for their flashlights. Jesus warns, "Be ready!" The Kingdom of Heaven will come suddenly and unexpectedly and with this parable says be ready even if the bridegroom is delayed.

Be ready! But how and with what? What is the oil? How do we avoid being fools? But then you realize we are fools. Psalm 14:1 - *"The fool says in his heart, there is no God,"* which is what we say every time we sin. Sin is an act of unbelief and rebellion against God and his Word; thinking we know more than God when it comes to what's best for our lives. We may even focus on having our best life ever in the here and now and **can't be burdened by bringing oil with us to every event in life.** It's inconvenient and gets in the way. What a burden to come to church on a weekly basis and hear how God has prepared us. Rather than store up up treasure in heaven we often store up where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. We foolishly think there will be time later.

The saying goes, *"But I don't need to go to church to be a Christian... Going to church doesn't make you a Christian anymore than standing in the garage makes you a car..."* That's partially true but where do you expect to find Christians other than at the feet of Jesus - hearing of his work for us? **Here his refreshing oil is poured over open wounds. That's what makes us ready is hearing of the word and work of Jesus.**

We are called to a life of faith and that is to influence how we wait and how we live every day until his return. So how should we live? Terrified of running out, afraid, and rushing around making last minute preparations? No but comforted.

Jesus is the returning bridegroom who will arrive joyfully at the end of time. This is a time to look forward to. This is a celebration. Jesus wants his disciples looking forward to the celebration with joy like a wedding. While some may dread the day, once preparations have been finished you can sleep well because there is nothing left to do. Jesus called out on the cross once everything was ready and preparations were complete, "It is finished."

He gave up his life, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and now prepares a place for you. He will come back again. Even if it seems like he is long in coming. Even if it feels like a delay. Jesus kingdom will come and he calls for patience. Why? Because God

doesn't want any to perish. Because he is patient. Because there are more that still need to be brought in to his church and God is not willing to lose a single soul.

Suddenly it becomes apparent that the foolish young women don't even know the bridegroom. Rather they rush off making demands of others and even of their host in order not to look foolish and unprepared. They should have just fallen on his mercy of the bridegroom. Jesus was at work making people ready. Through his preparations he paid for the sins of the world.

He's made us ready for something so much greater than Thanksgiving or any wedding. Through Word and Sacraments, God works not only to create faith but also to strengthen us in the faith. We are forgiven for our poor preparations, invited, and able to sit at the marriage feast of the Lamb. **That is because we are saved by grace and not by our being prepared.** We are forgiven for showing up without oil, forgiven for running around trying to do everything in our power and demonstrating our doubt over all he's done.

Then he gives us this oil again and again. God offers almost unlimited opportunities for us to hear his word and strengthen our faith. When he returns we will be ready. We will be brought in. Then the door will be shut. Why? Augustine says the door is shut to keep enemies out and friends in. You will be brought in because Jesus has opened a way so sleep well whether you are ready for Thanksgiving or not.

Thanksgiving may be later this week. You still have time to get ready. Judgment day could be later today and whether or not you suddenly run out of turkey or toilet paper at the most inconvenient moment - You are ready for Jesus to come again. He has made you ready. Amen.