

Matthew 25:1-13

## The Oil on Hand

### *Refilling our spirit's oil reserves*

There are just some passages of scripture that I find downright displeasing. And the story of the ten bridesmaids, in Matthew is one of those passages. There appears to be nothing redeeming in this passage, no forgiveness, no sharing, no leeway. It is one of those passages that if you were to give it to someone to read who does not believe in God, it would give them all the more reason to think being a Christian is ridiculous. It even starts out with unkind language, "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise." Foolish and wise – now isn't that just lovely.

Not only that, when the foolish ones ask for oil when theirs has run out, the wise ones say, "No!" And when the foolish ones get back from their search for oil, presumably successfully, the door was shut, and when they asked to have it opened the bridegroom says, "I tell you the truth, I don't know you." And they do not end up at the wedding celebration. They were foolish, late, and not welcome.

Nothing nice here. No kindness, just judgement. It seems to go against everything we know about God's forgiveness, the commands to help others, be patient and be good people. Nope, let's just let them deal with the consequences of their actions.

Hold on just a minute. Maybe that is just the point. That there are consequences to the actions we take in our lives, and it maybe that this parable is more about the oil than anything else.

There are a few things about the oil that are worth thinking about.

The story doesn't talk about how much oil the bridesmaids have at home. For all we know the wise ones had everything they owned on them, while the foolish ones had barrels of oil at home but never thought to bring extra with them. Could it be then that the story is about how much oil is on hand when it is needed?

And as much as this story could be, and has been used to guilt or shame us for not being ready for when Christ comes again, what if it is about being as prepared as a boy scout, as has been the traditional take on this story *and* about what we need to wait?

With Remembrance Day just passed, it makes me think of soldiers in the trenches, or waiting for the call to action. There was a lot that went into the preparation, the plans, and then waiting for things to happen. It was about searching, having everything in place for when one might come upon the enemy, waiting for them, then making a move.

Still, there are some things we can share that we have prepared for and things that we cannot. The armed forces may have prepared the men and women for action, hopefully giving them all the tools and artillery they needed, but it could not prepare them for the fear and death that they would have to face.

Bringing this conversation closer to home and to more recent experience...say we're going on a camping trip, we can share as needed, but you cannot prepare another for being able to hear ghost stories around the camp fire and still sleep without fear at night, there are some personalities, such as my own that can't do ghost stories and still sleep well.

You can borrow someone's homework, but cannot take from another the study they have put into preparing for a test. You can collaborate with a co-worker on a project, but when it comes time to present you have to know your stuff and be confident in order to pull off a presentation with ease.

So maybe the oil is not only about the spiritual preparation, but how that becomes a reserve that we carry with us for times we encounter more than we thought we would have to be prepared for.

We can share in worship together, we can read scripture together, and even listen to a sermon about it, but you or I being prepared to meet God at some point, that we can't do for each other. And when life is tough, we can walk together, talk together, and even pray together, but we cannot truly know another's heart, thoughts, and desire to live in a way that fills one's spiritual oil well to overflowing. That is something only we can do for ourselves.

Another point about this scripture that may be hard to recognize is that it stands with many others in Matthew that are about the second coming of Christ. And by the time this gospel came together, the Matthean Christians had already been waiting a long time. Now here we sit over 2000 years later, still waiting. So, waiting for Jesus to come a second time isn't really something that we get too excited about and it doesn't get a lot of air time.

Still, when we partake in communion one of the phrases that is spoken is, "until Christ comes again." We feast on the bread and the wine as a remembrance of Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension, as we wait for the time when we will be in full communion with Christ.

Also, each time we go to a Christian celebration of life, what has traditionally been called a funeral, we are not only celebrating the life of the person who has died, but also the hope of the resurrection - the hope that we will all experience Christ face to face one day. Every Christian funeral service will include words of hope for the resurrection.

So, we wait and we wait, prepared and preparing for the amazing moment when we are with Christ, the bridegroom. It is not that we are in a constant state of high alert, all the bridesmaids slept, both the foolish and the wise. But those who were wise were so

because they had enough oil on hand to be able to meet the groom and go with him. And this kind of oil just cannot be shared. It is not because we don't want to, it is because we can't. Some things we need to have within us and stored up. No one can give it to us.

We can be told about and even offer forgiveness and grace, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, but we can't give it to each other. We have to have done the work to have stores of that within ourselves.

We are called to be like a candle burning brightly, a light that leads others to Christ. To do so we need to have spent time in scripture, in prayer, in conversation with one another and with God. We learn to trust by expecting to see God at work in our lives each and every day. When we neglect those things, when we neglect the preparation, we may find that there is no more time to do what we always intended to do. To prepare for the moments in life and death that we wanted to prepare for.

I think back to when my children were graduating from high school. I am such a terrible procrastinator (actually I am very good at it!) that at times it has taken from me moments of joy. The tradition was that the class went to a special spot called Dunvegan on the Peace River to have informal pictures taken with one another. Family members were always welcome. I have three kids, I never made it to one of those moments, as I was always cleaning the house, having put off getting things ready in advance for the company that was going to arrive as part of the celebrations. I was not prepared, and I missed out, I never get to have those moments back. They are gone forever.

So it is with anything in life *and* when it comes to waiting for Christ. If we have thought to ourselves, "I will get to it," well let me encourage you to get to it now. Get to reconciling differences with others, or to forgiving yourself and others. Get to reaching for the spiritual things that will fill you up when the struggles and challenges become difficult and the day long. Get to helping others and giving of time, talent and energy that will benefit others and bring light to the world. Get to what it will take to have a reserve of oil that will enable you to be prepared for the day of the Lord.

There was a verse that I was taught many years ago to add to "give me oil in my lamp keep me burning," it was "give me gas in my Ford keep me trucking for the Lord." Maybe if we think of ourselves as having a spiritual oil reserve or tank that needs to be filled, that will help us to remember that we need oil, and we need to have an oil can on hand for when the oil runs dry so that no matter when we face Christ in our living, dying, or when Christ comes again, we will not find that we have to go searching, we have the reserves and we are ready. In Christ with Christ and through Christ.

Amen.