

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, November 12, 2023 based on Matthew 25:1-13

"How is your oil level?"

What are some things you get ready for or prepare for?

For school or work?

For bed at night?

For a date perhaps?

For guests to come at Thanksgiving or Christmas? Buying that turkey and all the fixings?

For a deployment as we honor Veterans this weekend.

For a medical procedure?

For end of life? Taking care of unfinished business.

What about getting ready for Jesus to come again? Have you thought about that lately? How do you get ready for that?

This is really the question our Gospel deals with about the 10 bridesmaids and the oil. How can we be ready to meet the Lord when he comes? And for many of us, our own death may come first before Jesus comes again, especially when no one knows neither the day or hour of when that will be. Our Church universal has had to deal with the delay of Jesus' return for over 2000 years. So, the question is, what do we do in the meantime?

In the parable of the kingdom, the 10 bridesmaids were preparing to meet the bridegroom, 5 bridesmaids were called wise and 5 foolish. The wise bridesmaids took their lamps and an extra flask of oil just in case something went wrong or not according to plan. The foolish bridesmaids took just their lamps and no extra oil. How often do things go wrong or not according to plan? It seems like all the time. Do you identify with the wise or foolish bridesmaids?

The bridegroom, who in the allegorical interpretation of the parable is Jesus, is delayed. All the bridesmaids, both the wise and foolish got tired waiting and fell asleep. When it came time to meet the

bridegroom, the wise ones had enough extra oil to trim their lamps to go meet the bridegroom. But the foolish didn't.

And this is where the parable gets sticky. The foolish asked to borrow some oil from the wise. But, shockingly, the wise said no, there won't be enough for you and us. Go and get some for yourselves. For how many of you does this parable make you angry? The wise should share their oil, right? Doesn't Jesus teach us to share and do unto others as you would have them do unto you? My mom wrote a devotion for her church on this text once and she called me in utter disgust. She couldn't understand why they just couldn't share. Sharing is caring.

And while the foolish bridesmaids went into town to get more oil, the bridegroom came and they missed him.

The good news of this parable is in the warning itself to be prepared at all times... to keep awake. Thankfully we still have time. But how much? This parable creates a sense of urgency for us. In the parable the foolish upon their return could not enter the wedding banquet because the door was shut. And the bridegroom said, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." Ouch.

When Luther interpreted his parable, he said the oil is our faith. Each person has to come to faith on their own. A saving faith can't be borrowed from your parents or a friend. Maybe early in life when you are baptized and go to Sunday school, or VBS, or confirmation you trust your parents that this is a good thing. But at some point, faith in our Triune God is something for you to claim for yourself. Does that make sense? I can't will my faith onto my kids.

As Lutherans we believe that faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit when we hear the Gospel... the Good News of Jesus Christ and see it in others. Luther's explanation of the third article of the apostles creed says...

Faith is simply grasping the hand of God that is always reaching out to you no matter what. God's hand is there for you, even when you don't feel worthy or holy. It is a gift of grace through Jesus' work on the cross.

Just like I can't will my love for the Packers onto my kids. But maybe, just maybe through tailgating together, watching games together, or seeing a Super Bowl victory, they may become lifelong Packer fans. Maybe not.

Or we may be like a car, how is your oil level? Are you full? Or are you a quart low? Is the engine light on? Do you have an extra quart in the back for those times you burn or leak oil? Which as humans seems all the time.

The good news is that Jesus did come to earth on our behalf and will come again. The door to the wedding banquet, which is heaven or simply a relationship with Jesus now is not shut to you. It is wide open for you. In Christian baptism, Jesus names us and claims us as his own forever.

Therefore, we shall not be afraid. We can be content even when things don't go according to plan, because we have a God who loves us and walks with us through everything. The cross says so. And we don't have to wait for Jesus. He is here now Holy Communion, and as we gather in Jesus' name.

Amen.