



PASTOR GWEN'S SERMON  
 24<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
 "HAVE YOU CHECKED YOUR OIL LATELY?"  
 SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2023

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN

Years ago, when I first started driving, in fact, many years ago, as I am sure most of you remember; you pulled into the service station over a rubber hose and a ding went off to tell the attendant that you were there. He came out as you rolled down your window and asked, "How can I help you?" I can remember saying confidently, "Fill er up!" And after he started the pump, he washed your windshield and even checked your oil. Remember those days? Well, I ask you, "How long has it been since you checked your oil?" Today, our cars are equipped with sensors to let you know if your oil is low or perhaps, you need to change it. I have not actually checked my own oil in eons.

Of course, I am not speaking literally, but rather figuratively. Do you have enough oil in your tank to get you where you are going? Our Gospel reading for today is another in a short series of stories that lead us down the path to the end of time and the second coming of Christ. Our church year is ending as well, with next week being the last week of the year where you will hear Terry Tarras talk about the judgment we will face. And so, to prepare ourselves to stand before the judgment thrown of God and account for our deeds, we should take a closer look at what it means to have enough oil in our tanks, to be ready for Christ's second coming.

The story seems rather simple even if you don't totally understand all the ins and outs of a typical Jewish wedding in Jesus' day. Five bridesmaids came prepared with an extra jug of oil to fill their lamps and 5 did not. Until they heard the "Herald" announce that the bridegroom was coming the bridesmaids turned their lamps down and slept. But then, when he arrived, they were to take the bride to him and process to where the wedding was to take place. We know that the 5 bridesmaids ran out of oil and so they were made to go to town to get more oil. During that time, the bride and the groom entered the hall to begin the wedding. The doors were locked, and the 5 foolish bridesmaids were on the outside looking in. And so, the stage is set for the drama of the parable. The wise bridesmaids had the forethought to plan ahead. They brought an extra flask of oil to refill their lamps, as needed. The foolish maidens did not. They did not check their oil. Their lamps went out and they had no other choice than to try to find oil as you could not be in the street without a properly lit lamp.

Scholars today look at this parable of the 10 bridesmaids more as an allegory where the people places and things have a hidden or symbolic meaning. It is generally accepted that the bridesmaids are the church that is waiting for the Second Coming. The bridegroom is

Christ. The wedding feast is the great and joyous occasion in which Christ comes for his church or in other words the marriage supper of the Lamb, as we learn in Revelation. The groom's arrival in the dark of night is the Second Coming itself and the closing of the door to the banquet hall is the final judgment.

Those same scholars disagree or vary in their understanding of the oil. And it is the oil that is the center of our story as we are told to be prepared with oil for Christ's return. In a writing by Martin Luther on this allegory, Luther felt that the oil represented faith. Some others have stated that the oil was really piety, good works, or a personal relationship with the Lord.

If we go back and read many of the parables in Matthew's Gospel, several of which we have talked about in these weeks after Pentecost, we find that being prepared is a huge theme in Jesus' teachings. Being prepared-having oil, means working faithfully for the Lord. Being prepared-having oil, means practicing good stewardship, good ecological practices, careful management of time and money, and proclamation of the Word. Being prepared-having oil, means generosity to those in need. Being prepared-having oil, means obeying Jesus' teachings. Sounds to me like being prepared-having oil, is a lot like living the life of a Christian. And so, Luther's answer of faith seems to be the answer. We live a life as followers of Jesus because we believe that he is the Good Shepherd who will lead us home. He gave up his life for us on the rugged cross so we could have forgiveness of our sins, abundant and eternal life.

From this allegory, we then can glean a few things about being ready. First of all, we have absolutely no idea when Jesus will return, so constant preparedness should be the order of the day. Some people today are convinced that the war in Israel is the beginning of the end. I even got a message when the war started from a friend asking how I was going to preach that Sunday and if I thought like she did, that the end of the world is near. To me Scripture is clear that many things will happen before the Parousia, the second coming of Christ, but no one knows the time except God Almighty. But in this story, I don't think Jesus is trying to tell the disciples secret clues so they can figure out when He will come again. Only God knows the timing, the end of the story.

Secondly, I think that we can take heed to the fact that when Christ returns, only we can get ourselves ready. Many people ask of this allegory, why the wise did not help the foolish maidens by giving them some oil. Well, the oil was not like food or water. It represents the faith or righteousness of the bridesmaids. And it is that faith that we need to be prepared with before Christ comes. At the last minute, it cannot be shared with others. Faith is not something that can be borrowed when we need it. It is something that you have to develop on your own. The Scottish theologian William Barclay, put it this way:

"The text warns us that there are certain things which cannot be borrowed. The foolish virgins found it impossible to borrow oil when they discovered they needed it. A man cannot borrow a relationship with God; he must possess it. A man cannot borrow a character; he must be clothed with it. We cannot always be living on the spiritual capital which others have amassed. There are certain things which we must win or possess for ourselves, for we cannot borrow them from others." Our faith, our relationship with God and our character are what make us right with God and are intertwined. As Lutherans, we realize that faith without works is dead. And we cannot earn our way to heaven. God's

grace is amazing and will be showered on us. Having our relationship with God and our character in line is important. Jesus reminds us that repentance is important so we can have that relationship with God. Our bridesmaid story tells us it is of the utmost importance to be right with God, to have our oil can filled to the brim.

We should always strive to be prepared for the return of Our Lord, by repenting those things we do that separate us from the love of God in Christ. We do that by developing a character of loving, giving, service, and caring for others before we care for ourselves. Doing the things Jesus taught, feeding the hungry, giving shelter to the homeless, giving drink to the thirsty and visiting the sick in prison. In other words, loving your neighbor. And we need to grasp that relationship with God and never let go through worship, reading His Word, prayer, and most of all listening to His voice. Also, we need to continue to build up the Kingdom of God as our first priority, living lives that glorify God rather than ourselves. Then we should have no fear, we will be right with God. Or in other words our oil lamps, flasks, cans will be overflowing, and we will be ready for that important moment when the Bridegroom returns to judge the living and the dead. **AMEN**