

This morning I will share some stories with you that hopefully will help unpack this parable of the ten virgins. Stories help us to connect to similarities and associations to our lives. I believe that is why Jesus taught using parables/stories to make his points. When reading the gospel in preparation for my sermon I was reminded of my nieces and nephews that always thought they could out wait Santa. They would go about their business during the day of playing hard and long, eating as much junk food as allowed while on winter break, all the while plotting how they would see Santa when he would come. The youngest of the bunch would always say “he’s coming when it gets dark”. Another would say, “he is coming when he smells some food cooking.” My niece, the oldest of the crew at that time who was nine, would say, “he’s coming when he gets through delivering toys on the other side of the world and that will take a long time.” I would suggest to them they might want to take a nap because no one really knew what time Santa would come and if it was late, a nap would help them stay awake later because I was certain that it would be after midnight. Of course, midnight was way past their bed time. You would think after me warning them, year after year, they would at least try it my way. But nooo! Auntie didn’t know what she was talking about. They thought I just wanted to trick them and wouldn’t wake them up if they fell asleep. You see, what auntie did know, was the normal wear and

tear of their day would burn them out just like the foolish virgins that had no oil accept that which was on the wick and their lamps would burn out.

This parable is indeed about being prepared. For girl scouts and boy scouts, first responders, military personnel, they would get this parable right away. For stubborn folks like me and so many others that live in climates that require you to be prepared, we might not get this so quickly. Even though year after year in Florida, we are advised of hurricane readiness and preparations needed, we don't heed the advice.

Here's another story for you: when we decide to come to seminary, we are told some things to do before arriving. A list of items is provided you might need while at seminary. Like my nieces and nephews, young seminarians don't pay much attention to that last part of 'might need'. Well, this past summer we had a power outage that lasted a long time, power wasn't restored until that morning in most places on campus. A very young individual called the welcome center and asked for a flash light because the power was out. Without thinking, the person answering the phone said, "I am sorry but we don't have flash lights here. You might want to check with maintenance." THE REPLY FROM THE YOUNG ADULT WAS: "I did already and they said I should have brought one with me because it

was on the list". I must also tell you, this individual worked in maintenance, it was their seminary job which explains the reason for the answer that seemed heartless coming from maintenance. The opportunity for the seminarian to be prepared had passed by.

To be truthful, the average person doesn't think about being prepared for the future in every aspect of their lives. They allow something to go lacking. Most of us keep up with our insurance policies and even try to save some money. But will that really help us or others? We all would like a glimpse into the future if we could get it. The disciples are no different. They wanted to know when the end would come and what would be the signal to let them know Jesus was coming. Another story: How many of us have traveling routines or had when your kids were little? One of our routines was: make sure you go to the bathroom before we start, don't load up on fluids while we are traveling and when we stop use the restroom then even you don't have to go. Traveling on the Florida turnpike can be treacherous. The rest stations are well lit and the distance between each one is always posted. They are like warning signals. Next rest area is 47 miles or next rest area has no working facilities etc. I didn't heed our family travel rules and almost paid dearly for it. I never knew one could squirm as much as I did for 47 miles. You see in my mind I thought, I could hold out until the next stop because

my nap was more important at the moment when everyone else was following the rules. I didn't feel the urgency of needing to be prepared. I knew there would be another rest stop, I had that assurance. But my body didn't know when that would be. Mentally I knew I had the ability to prepare by going to the restroom even without urgency. But doing it was a whole other matter.

The gospel today is not seeking to create uncertainty and doubt in the heart of the Christian. It is not seeking to rob the Christian of his/her assurance. But it is seeking to warn those who have a false assurance, but not salvation. In the last days, just as in Jesus' time and today, there will be those who appear to be Christians, but are not, they will appear to be prepared or as some might say, "I am ready when Jesus comes":

First, Jesus is warning us in this parable that there will be a number of people who look like Christians, who associate with Christians, and who even think they are Christians, who will be shocked to learn that they are not saved at the return of our Lord. What a sobering thought. For some of us it will be just like the Southwest airlines commercial. We will want to get away, or should I say, we will want to get in like the five virgins that were left outside because of lack of preparation. It's the commercial where there appears to be a royal bachelor that

has been invited to a social gathering, and all the eligible ladies, perhaps virgins like in the parable have been invited to the gathering. The ladies all stand around poised to be invited to a conversation with the bachelor. As fate would have it, none of them are chosen, he actually approaches a dog that is isolated by itself who he thought was a lady. One can speculate why he went to the dog he thought was a lady in waiting. Maybe it was because he thought she/dog wasn't too anxious to be selected. She knew her worth, and didn't have to position herself, she was ready and prepared. Although, the bachelor ends up as the one that is embarrassed and needs to get away. The dog/lady appeared to be prepared. Those who under estimate how long before the next rest stop (or refuse to buy oil) are the people who refuse to heed the warnings of God's Word and the invitation of salvation through faith in Jesus. Those who don't read the rest stop signs are those who don't think they need it, at least at the moment they think they can wait.

Second, those who don't read the signs and fall asleep are lulled into a false confidence by the fact that everything appears to be fine at the moment. The bladder is doing fine; there are no preliminary urges. And so, we feel confident in our choice not to use the rest stop facilities at that time. Jesus told us that He would come at a time when we did not expect Him. Apparently, our Lord's

coming will be at a rather peaceful time, when there are no indications of trouble ahead. Don't be lulled into a false sense of security. He will come at a time when it seems we are doing just fine.

Third, those who don't read the rest area signs are those who wrongly suppose that it will not take as long to get to the next stop. I just went not too long ago. I'm not a baby, I know when I have to go. But we lull ourselves into thinking that there is not a problem and it will be ok. There will surely be another rest station ahead, and if not, we can just exit and find a gas station that is not too far out of the way and we can use their facilities. We forget that when we exit you have to pay the toll. We also make the assumption they will be open like the rest stops along the way. Five of the virgins made assumptions. They assumed someone else would bail them out. This false confidence has gotten many people into trouble. Those who think they will have other chances to come to faith in Jesus are making a very dangerous assumption. The coming of our Lord will be sudden and unexpected, and when He comes, all chances of changing our course have been forfeited. The coming of our Lord ends our opportunity to turn to Him in faith, and it seals our doom. My grandmother used to sing the song 'I want to be ready when Jesus comes'. Jesus in his parable is saying the same. Be ready.

The coming of our Lord was not to be immediate, as the disciples supposed, but at a much more distant time. But when He does come, it will be without warning, and at a time we don't expect Him. When He comes, our fate is sealed, and there will be no opportunity to change our minds then. We must therefore be prepared now (and from now on) by acknowledging our sins, our helplessness, our need for salvation, and by trusting in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus in our place. Being ready means, among other things (and especially in this parable), trusting in Jesus, and having our sins forgiven. It means following the rules. Paying attention to the signs that are given to us every day. I don't just mean about our spiritual wellbeing but our physical as well.

My last story: A dear friend of mine passed away a few years ago. She was an educator like me. A wonderful person. Loved the students, loved God and loved her family. She honored me as an educator by asking me to teach her identical twin daughters in seventh and eighth grade. The weekend before she died we spent it together. I had broken a bone in my foot and it had been surgically repaired so I wasn't able to drive. My friend offered to take me out so I could run a few errands. I remember thinking about how happy she was and nothing seemed to be wrong. She wanted me to see her new condo because finally she was an empty nester. Her girls were on their own now that they had finished

college. And although I was now an administrator at another school we still remained close. I was shocked when I heard the news that on that Thursday after we spent the weekend together she was gone. She had come by my home again on Tuesday to pick up some drapes that another friend that worked with her would alter for me. On Thursday she died in the school parking lot due to an aneurism. Sometime later, I was visiting the school and spoke with one of the staff members at the school. This individual didn't ever say much when I worked at the school but I would always listen to him whenever he spoke. He said, "you know Ms. King's check engine light came on long before that day, she just ignored it." Then he shared with me how she often complained of headaches, and even that day, she complained of a headache and said she would go to the doctor. My point to all of the stories is God is merciful enough to always give us signals but we don't heed them because we always think we have more time. Our oil for the lamps comes in many forms to help us with preparation.

God has given us gifts in the form of doctors with great intelligence to show us how to take care of his temples and spiritual leaders that show us through scripture and living how to be in this world. He has blessed us with the abilities to read the rest stop signs along the path of our lives. This is our oil. Christ is coming again, being prepared as the five wise virgins is what God is seeking from us. We



don't have to get caught in a pinch. We must begin to live a holy life that will enable us to live in the eternal kingdom. Loving our neighbors as ourselves beyond words, praying for the communities that are in need. Making others feel loved when they are broken, creating a society where all will feel safe and secure. This is our oil. We need not view the disasters of gun violence in Texas and Nevada or terrorist acts in New York as a sign that the world is ending. But let's view it as a sign to act as Christ would want us to. View it as a sign to be a real Christian instead a false one. With a bumper sticker or vanity plate we can proclaim to be Christian. Let's go beyond that and love one another as Christ loved us unconditionally. Let it not matter that my skin is darker than yours and your speech is different than mine. We have the power to change the world for the better. The power to heal where there is brokenness. It may not be on our doorstep yet. But we cannot be far away from a situation that we need to be prepared for. Let's make sure we have enough oil when the bridegroom comes so we will not be locked out but rejoicing inside at the great banquet.