

Lectionary A Pentecost 22 November 9, 2014
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, IN
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What's Important Here, Oil or Water?

I don't mind telling you this Gospel is one that everyone says is a hard one. Last Tuesday morning Rebecca Grate, the pastor at Shepherd of the Hills, and I were studying the lessons for this week. We looked on line, in commentaries, all the wisdom sources we have been taught to search and basically all of them said, "So you are going to preach on that parable? Good luck with that!"

Let's face it. Jesus told these parables to stir things up, to get people thinking, to upset the complacency of those who think they have the answers. He starts out, "*Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this...*" I'm sure that got everyone's attention, because that's what everyone is curious about, right? What is going to happen when I die? What about when the world comes to an end? What's that going to be like? So Jesus has a captive audience. Why not make the best of it?

What's with these ten bridesmaids? Five were foolish, ok, I'll give him that one. Being there with those five selfish gals is kind of foolish. I'm sure they were all excited about the wedding. Weddings are times of anticipation. Get the lamps and oil and let's go wait for the bridegroom. But that guy took forever. He was late. Who'd a thought? Well, maybe the five girls who brought extra oil.

All the girls got tired of waiting. They all took a nap. They all were awakened by someone else. "*At midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him."*"

Ok I have some questions here. All the lamps went out while they were sleeping. Actually, wasn't it a good thing they took that nap? Otherwise, if they had stayed awake keeping their lamps burning, there may not have been oil left for any of their lamps. So five of them didn't have oil to relight their lamps. Could they use some of the extra oil their girlfriends brought? "Nope, sorry, we might run out, too. Go buy your own."

All right, what about that oil? 1. If they had no oil then how could they see to go buy more? And its midnight. Did they have convenience stores open twenty-four hours? 2. Even though there might not have been enough oil for ten lamps, couldn't they have shared the lamps? Couldn't two girls have walked together and shared one lamp? After all, doesn't that go more with Jesus' teachings—looking out for each other? In our 1 Thessalonians text it comes right out and says, "*Therefore encourage one another...*" Does it seem to you like these two texts for today are sort of contradicting each other?

Maybe that's it. Being prepared means more than having enough oil. Maybe those five "foolish" maids were so preoccupied with getting their own oil that they forgot what was important. Maybe they didn't even think to share because not having oil in their lamps would have made them look bad in the bridegroom's eyes. If they didn't run to buy more oil they might have still gotten inside the door, but they would have been embarrassed. Is it possible that they made a choice to save face over getting into heaven? Now that is

foolish! Being prepared—isn't it more about the priorities of our heart than the stuff we get ready?

I totally get having to shut the door to keep out someone who could cause you damage. Let me tell you about my encounter with "Steve". It just happened yesterday. I was working on this sermon at my kitchen table. I got on line to do some research. Google Chrome would not open. I tried Internet Explorer. It started to open and then I got this warning. "Your computer has been infected. Call this number immediately to correct the problem." That message wouldn't go away. My computer was frozen. So, yes, I called the number. His accent made him sound like his name should be Asad, but no, he said his name was Steve. Well, Steve said he had to get access to my computer to help me. I know, I know. I am right in line with those foolish maidens. I know just enough about computers to be dangerous. I followed his instructions until he started listing all the things he had to do to my computer before it crashed. It would only cost me \$299.99 for one year.

That is when I closed the door on old Steve. He tried hard. Knocking on my computer's life's door. I told him, "I'll take it to my local service man."

"But you don't know what he will do to your computer!" Steve told me.

"I don't know what you are doing to my computer, either, Steve!" I turned off the computer and hung up the phone. I shut the door and basically told Steve the same thing the bridegroom told those five oil impoverished girls. *"Truly I tell you, I do not know you."*

So, am I any closer to understanding the meaning of this parable about the kingdom of heaven? I don't know, maybe, maybe not, and I think that was its purpose. Jesus wants us to ask questions and wonder. Jesus doesn't want us to be so confident in ourselves.

What I **do** get from this is the fact that waiting is difficult. And we all wait for important things in our lives. We are in this together. When Matthew wrote this story, his people were waiting. They really thought Jesus was returning before they died. They were anxious because some of them were dying off and the kingdom of heaven hadn't come, yet. This parable was shared to let them know that they were in this together and heaven wasn't going to come when **they** thought it should come. Don't give up. Just be prepared. It will come. And what does it mean to be prepared?

Maybe that is where the text from Amos comes in. This text basically asks, "Why do you want heaven to come, anyway? Don't wish your life away. While you are waiting there's justice work to do. That's how God wants us to prepare. Look out for each other. Be busy with this business of life. Love God with everything you have and love each other as much as you love yourself.

That's what I think God wants for us. You see Jesus did the prep work for us. Jesus took care of the oil deprivation. Jesus' death and resurrection is what has the door opened wide. Jesus has taken care of our lamps. Believing in Jesus' promises is how we are prepared. This means we don't have to waste a lot of time worrying about *whether* we are the wise or foolish maidens. We know who we are. We are God's Children. We have been prepared by God.

So let's keep doing what God's children are here to do.

"...Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." We have a full supply of ever-flowing Baptismal water right here, strengthening and empowering us to gush out into our community and world, doing our part in "rolling out justice." We at Grace and Peace are swimming in that justice pool with the work we are doing at the Mission of Grace with the Fresh Air Community of Faith and with Emanuel and Christ Lutheran Churches.

We dove right in as we put up a sign saying we are a Reconciling in Christ Church. We openly let all people know they are welcome to come swim with us, especially those who don't feel welcomed in other churches, those whose sexual identity and gender orientation seem to close doors. We are splashing in that water together with our partners as we open our doors to share space with the AA group who meets in our building, with the Bible studies who meet here, and with the Life Covenant Church who worships in our building on Elliot St. and the Fresh Air gang who had a wonderful first service in this building last Thursday.

So what's important here, anyway—oil or water? As we offer our prayers today, bringing them up to the altar as we come to share the Lord's supper, let's pray for those who feel closed out, who feel like their oil has run out. Let's pray that God continues to challenge us and call us to open our doors in even more ways for justice to pour out from this branch of God's rolling stream called Grace and Peace Lutheran Church. Amen