

“The Oil of God’s Grace”

Matthew 25:1-13

Stewardship Sermon 2 – Nov. 12, 2017

“Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning! Give me oil in my lamp, I pray!

Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning, burning, burning...! Keep me burning till the light of day!”

This lovely little Christian song that just seemed to appear out of nowhere one day—in the life of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church was probably first of all sung by some *believers in the Church of England in the 1950’s*.

This little song, like the parable Jesus shares with us in our Gospel lesson, reminds us that throughout the Bible, oil is considered one of our greatest necessities in life.

Do you remember the *widow of Zarephath, to whom Elijah* went when he was sent to Syria and there was a great drought that had come upon the whole land? In *I Kings 17:12*, we read: “When the rest of her food had been exhausted, she still had: “A handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a cruse!”

Jeremiah 31:12 says: “Grain, oil and wine are expressions of God’s goodness to his people!” In the OLD TESTAMENT it seems that Olive Oil was used for three main purposes.

(1) First, in the COOKING OF FOOD;

(2) Secondly, in the anointing of PROPHETS, PRIESTS AND KINGS ABOUT TO BEGIN NEW MINISTRIES; SINCE OIL WAS A POWERFUL SYMBOL FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT.

In I Samuel 16:1, God tells Samuel to take a HORN FULL OF OIL to Jesse’s house where he will anoint one of Jesse’s sons as Saul’s successor. No one would have ever guessed that it would be David. Then in verse 13 we read: “*Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed David in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward!*”

(3) THIRDLY, OIL WAS ALSO USED IN THE CONTINUAL OFFERING UP OF BURNT OFFERINGS IN THE TEMPLE, IN JERUSALEM!

Nor is oil of any less “value” in the New Testament era!

But more practically speaking: **Olive oil was used as fuel in lamps!**

The parable that Jesus shares with us in our Gospel lesson this morning is one that he spoke to his disciples in the final days of his earthly life that points us ultimately to that great and glorious Day of his Second Coming;

But it also speaks to us about our need **TO BE PREPARED TO MEET THAT DAY HEAD ON!**

How? By being filled with oil of God’s grace ourselves!

By being filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit ourselves!

I know that it could be very tempting for me now, to launch into a big discussion about the CONCEPT of GRACE that I’ll do my best, to refrain from doing: But I will tell you that the word **grace appears 190 times in the Old Testament**. The word “**grace**” **appears 155 times in the New Testament**. In the Bible, grace is not just a prayer at mealtime or a lovely name for a girl. **Grace is a foundational pillar of our faith**. Understanding grace is essential for us as God’s people! **God’s grace is not something we have earned or deserved!** Grace is not ours to earn! It is God’s to give.

Because we are sinful people incapable of doing anything in our helpless state, we are in need of God's grace. God chose us to be his very own people through the gift of his Son, come into our world to be our Savior, in spite of our sins.

Some people view **GRACE AS AN ACRONYM: GOD'S REDEMPTION AT CHRIST'S EXPENSE.** The word first appears in **Genesis 6:8:** *"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD."* Listen to **Titus 2:11-14**, often read in our Christmas Eve Worship Service: *"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, And to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age; waiting for our blessed hope: The appearing of the glory of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ."*

BUT NOW CHANGING THE SUBJECT: WHAT PROVISIONS HAVE YOU MADE FOR YOURSELF IN YOUR HOME If suddenly your **home is without electricity in the middle of the night** and all of your lights go out?

This past Monday, I was in **TARGET**, AND WHILE THINKING ABOUT THE SERMON FOR TODAY, I found myself drawn to that aisle in Target where all of the newly developed, high-powered flashlights are for sale. I ended up buying another flashlight for \$25, because my attitude towards flashlights is a lot like my attitude towards extension cords: **YOU CAN NEVER HAVE TOO MANY!**

TARGET HAS SOME FLASHLIGHTS FOR SALE NOW—THAT ARE \$45 EACH. BUT EVEN A \$45 FLASHLIGHT WON'T HELP YOU A BIT WITHOUT HAVING GOOD BATTERIES IN IT!

THE MOTTO OF THE **BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA** HAS ALWAYS BEEN: **"BE PREPARED."** My grandmother used to always say: A **stitch** in time saves nine and an ounce of **prevention** is worth a pound of cure!

Seatbelts, for the most part were a great invention, but unless they're buckled they can't help you at all! A few **fire extinguishers** is also something everyone needs in their homes! Do you have some? Are they are still good working order? Do you know where they are?

Jesus' parable of the **Ten Virgins** comes **NOT really as a "threat" but as a "warning!"** And there is a big difference between a threat and a warning isn't there? The purpose of a threat is to provoke fear, to intimidate and to heighten other people's anxiety! A warning, on the other hand, is designed to safeguard, to protect and to encourage people to take shelter and to prepare themselves for any type of eminent danger! When conditions are ripe for a tornado, the weatherman issues a "Tornado Watch." When an actual tornado is spotted, however, that tornado watch then becomes a "Tornado Warning!"

In the previous chapter, chapter 24 in St. Matthew's Gospel: Jesus has been speaking to his disciples at the end of his ministry about the close of this present age! Jesus was not only thinking about going to the cross to pay for our sins, but also about his Second Coming already then!

Jesus certainly captured their attention because his hearers asked him: *"When shall these things be?"* And Jesus' answer comes to them in **verse 36:** *"Of that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son of Man, but only my Father! Then we come to our Gospel lesson today:*

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom!"

It was the **Spanish philosopher, poet and essayist, GEORGE SANTAYANA** WHO FIRST SAID: **"THOSE WHO FORGET HISTORY ARE DESTINED TO REPEAT IT."**

MUCH OF THE BIBLE IS A HISTORY BOOK, AND ONE OF THE CLEAREST HISTORY LESSONS PRESENTED TO US IN THE BIBLE - IS THAT NOT ONLY THE WORLD; THE **OLD TESTAMENT PEOPLE WERE NOT PREPARED TO MEET THE PROMISED MESSIAH WHEN HE CAME INTO OUR WORLD!**

The prophets had certainly given God's people plenty of signs that should have alerted them to Christ's Coming. The prophets said there would be a **forerunner** and there was in the Person of—John the Baptist. The prophets identified the **forerunner as a voice** crying in the wilderness. John the Baptist said: **"I am that voice!"** The prophets said THE MESSIAH would be born in **Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)** and he was (Luke 2:11)! The prophets said he would be **born of a virgin** and he was (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:20-25)! The prophets said he would be born of **King David's lineage** and he was (John 7:42)! The prophets said he would bring the **light of God's grace to Galilee** and he did (Matthew 4:12-16!

The prophets said he would have **great power and he did!** But the world was still not prepared to meet CHRIST and even God's own people were not ready to receive him when he came into our world! And so St. John tells us: **"He came unto His own and His own received Him not. He was in the world and the world was made by Him but the world knew Him not"** (John 1:13)!

But here's the Gospel: **But to all who did receive him; who believed on his name—to them He gave the power to become the children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God"** (John 1:14)!

And then do you know what St. John tells us next: **"The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"** (John 1:17)! And Jesus is not **"threatening"** us here, but lovingly warning us not to let the same thing happen to us when he comes again in glory!

For after that, there will then be no more recourse for us in the future! **When that day does arrive upon the earth: People may knock all they want, but the door will remain shut. The day of opportunity will have come and gone forever.**

Now the parable is very simple. It's rich. It's exciting. One of the most marvelous things about this parable is its **SIMPLICITY.**

In the first century Hebrew culture: A wedding was THE greatest event in a town or a village. Everybody got involved, friends, family, extended family, everybody. It was a time of happiness. It was a time of festivity. It was a time of celebration. And that's the scene we have here.

Among the Jewish people back then, **there were three segments** to actually becoming married. **The first was the official engagement.**

The second was the "betrothal;" when the wedding vows were spoken by the bride and the groom and the wedding liturgy actually took place. The couple would come together before friends and family and **speak out loud their vows and binding promises** to each other. They would make their **commitments.**

Therefore, from that very moment, they were legally married; "so married" that any breaking of a betrothal period required a legal divorce. There had to be an actual divorce because their engagement; betrothal was tantamount to marriage except that then the husband and wife continued to live apart from each other for another whole year! And if the **husband just happened to die** during that period, **the "wife" was considered to be a widow.** Even if the marriage had not yet been physically consummated nor the newlyweds actually lived together. So you can imagine, **can't you, the anticipation** that must have been in the heart of the bride and the anticipation that must have been in the heart of the groom; as they both lived separately for a year.

But the third segment of marriage in that first century Jewish culture was that of the Wedding Feast and the time when the marriage would actually be consummated.

This is that time when the bridegroom would come to the place where the bride was “hanging out.” The bridegroom came with all of his groomsmen to the house where his bride would have been patiently and hopefully also—excitedly awaiting his arrival. Then he would “collect” his bride and her bridesmaids and the whole wedding party would then go in procession with the lighted lamps of the bridesmaids, parading through the night sky and through the village in a joyful celebration of singing and talking. The extreme height of joy that the newlyweds would experience on that day; quite possibly would never, ever be experienced by them to that high of a level ever again!

BUT NOW, ALL OF OUR ATTENTION IS TAKEN OFF OF THE BRIDE/GROOM AND OUR EYES ARE SHIFTED INSTEAD TO THE TEN VIRGINS, FIVE OF WHOM WERE FOOLISH AND FIVE OF WHOM WERE WISE.

INITIALLY WHEN YOU LOOKED AT ALL OF THESE BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMEN, THERE WAS NO WAY THAT YOU YOURSELF COULD HAVE INITIALLY DISTINGUISHED, FOR YOURSELF IN YOUR OWN HEART AND MIND WHICH ONCE WERE FOOLISH AND WHICH ONES WERE WISE. For based upon all outward appearances: The foolish and the wise virgins LOOKED THE SAME ON THE OUTSIDE! They all attended to the bride. All would have had their LAMPS lighted. The Greek text here tells us that the chief characteristic of the five foolish virgins is that they were, using the Greek adjective, THEY WERE **moros**, from which we receiving our English word: “moronic.” The English equivalent, quite simply, to the Greek word “moros” is “stupid.” Five of these lovely young women, however, were **phronimos**, a Greek word that means “prudent, sensible, thoughtful” and yes, also “wise!” What’s the deciding criterion here? “The foolish ones took no additional oil with them” (v. 3)! While the “wise” ones, each took an extra supply of oil with them.”

SO HERE’S THE APPLICATION TO YOUR LIFE AND TO MY LIFE ON THE LAST DAY OF THIS WORLD’S CONTINUING TO EXIST AS YOU AND I KNOW IT TODAY!

“They that were foolish took their LAMPS BUT NO OIL with them, but the wise TOOK OIL in their vessels” (V.3)!

Now what is that oil? It is the necessary reality of God’s saving grace that will always distinguish some people from other people!

The oil is the necessary grace without which no human being will ever see the Lord. It is the true gift of salvation. It is Christ’s righteousness being imputed to us as our own righteousness, by the grace of God through faith—with “faith” being also the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is always working through the Gospel to create faith in your heart and mind.

The oil is the righteousness of Jesus Christ this is 100% imputed to us by the grace of God, to all people who will but confess their sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!

The oil is the transformed inward life of a true believer!

On the last day there will be a gigantic crowd of people, all of who will be outwardly and ostensibly honoring Jesus Christ; the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings! Some will have oil in their lamps - meaning their hearts will be prepared. Others will have no oil in their lamps - meaning their hearts will be unprepared. My friends, at times, we have all heard others speaking about: “Preparing for the Worst.” Whenever there is a hurricane coming our way down here in the south or maybe even a gigantic snowstorm, something that I think they still call a “blizzard” up north. This is when is people start talking about “preparing for the worst.” If such a disaster were to threaten us, we would then be happy to have a house full of supplies. It would be nice to have one of those a kerosene generators; purchasable at Lowes/Home Depot, Or a few weeks’ supply of non-perishable food items on hand and plenty of coffee! Oh, please let there be coffee! It would be helpful, then also, to maybe even have one of those camp stoves--and a can of

propane--and a tent--and blankets--and a first-aid kit! One of the lessons many people who were the victims of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria learned is that it is always a good idea to have fresh bottled drinking water on hand. This is one of the **most precious commodities people might desperately need**. Dieticians even tell us that we can each live a relatively long time without food. We are even told that we can even live quite a while without coffee. But we really need water. BUT WHAT ABOUT PREPARING FOR THE BEST? Probably not! Has anyone ever told you to prepare for the best? I've heard anyone say, "Prepare for the best, because you never know what will happen next!" But why should we only prepare only for the worst? Especially if we are the disciples of Jesus Christ? Why shouldn't we also prepare for the BEST as well?

Those who will be whole-heartedly welcomed into the kingdom of heaven on the last day, are people who are preparing for the best! Isn't it our chief goal in life as Christians is to live in anticipation of that day when we will hopefully hear our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ say to each of us: ***"Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your Master" (Matthew 25:21)!***

These are people who prepared for the best! We need to be ready for the great day when Jesus will come again! When at long last he will usher us into a kingdom where we will no longer need any locks on our doors! There we will no longer be in any need of police officers; or the Armed Forces--or for Security Systems. There will be no more tornado watches, tornado warnings; or tropical storm and hurricane warnings. In that kingdom we will never need an oncologist!

Jesus told this story to encourage us to prepare for the BEST.

But in the words of William Barclay: "If this parable means anything it is teaching us that we cannot always live on the spiritual capital of others; that others have amassed, by the grace of God, for themselves! There are certain things which we must win or possess for ourselves! We cannot borrow them from others!" AMEN