

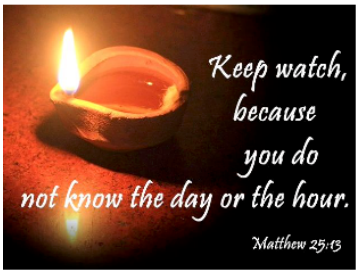
Sunday, November 8, 2026
24th Sunday after Pentecost

Well, I don't know about you, but wedding. Think about the last wedding you went to. And every wedding—most of them—has months of planning to go into it. And on the day itself, there is a delay. Usually not too bad, five to ten minutes, right? But in some instances, I've waited over an hour because the makeup and hair appointment ran over, or the limousine got lost in traffic. Where's the photographer? There is always someone late. And Jesus chooses the example of waiting for a delayed wedding as a scene of one of his most searching parables, uncomfortable parables, the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids. The problem is that there is a delayed ceremony. It's the groom this time who's coming, but is delayed. Now this party has a serious edge to it, because we know that some who were invited will miss it. All ten bridesmaids were part of this wedding party, but five were not ready.

You know, it's November, and we're already scrambling to be ready for what's ahead, right? Oh boy, Thanksgiving is a few weeks away, and then then Advent follows on its heels. And if that weren't enough, we're in stewardship season. And there's a lot to juggle here, church, a lot to get ready. And it's the perfect time for us to ask, what can we learn from these wise bridesmaids?

So let's return to the parable. The wedding, as we've talked before, is an important occasion, isn't it? It was often the highlight, a celebration, in the face of the drudgery of village life. Sometimes, after sunset, the bridegroom would journey to the bride's house to bring her over to his parents' house. So from this text, we can assume the bridesmaids had this important duty of providing the light along the way in the dark of the night.

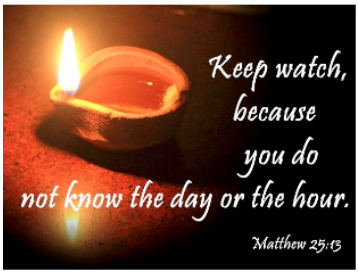
Now, oil is a traditional Jewish symbol for the kind of faith that produces good deeds, a robust and lived out faith, the oil of faith and daily practices that we carry with us. And the flame is the light of the faith that is given off for others to see. Proverbs shares this imagery that the light of the righteous rejoices but the lamp of the wicked goes out.



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So, the story of the ten bridesmaids encourages us to keep up our good work, especially in challenging times, in times where things always seem to be delayed and waiting. It reminds us that we are all members of this bridal party. We all have responsibilities to use our oil to ensure there is light in darkness. Now, all 10 bridesmaids were invited. All 10 had lamps. All 10 looked the part. And all 10 grew drowsy and fell asleep in the delay. Being tired is not the same as being unready. The difference was what they carried in their flasks. The wise took plenty of oil. They carried extra flasks. And the foolish brought lamps, assuming that with the limited oil in the lamp, that that would be enough to make it, and it would work out. A lamp with little or no oil is only a decoration. And in the dark, what is the decoration worth? Nothing. Properly fueled and lived out, a lamp gives enough light for a frightened person to find the door.

Jesus tells us in Matthew that you are the light of the world. He doesn't say you should try to be. He says that you are. And no one lights a lamp just to hide it under a basket. But a light needs fuel. And that fuel has to come from somewhere, those good deeds, the faithful acts that we carry out even when the delay keeps the light shining. It's midnight in this story. And most of us know what midnight feels like. Trust worn thin. Neighbors who've become strangers or strangers who've become suspects. Meanwhile, wars have dragged on for years. Sometimes in places like Sudan, that most of us rarely hear about in the news or like Gaza, which no longer seems to make the news anymore. People are scrambling for a morsel to eat, a drop of medicine, an old tarp to protect themselves from the elements. And many of us carry a quieter darkness, a loneliness, perhaps, a worry about money or an estrangement from a loved one or a friend. Whatever our circumstances, we have all found ourselves coping with darkness and yearning to find light in the midst. Darkness does not make people wicked, but it makes them frightened and frightened people can become paralyzed and not be able to do anything.



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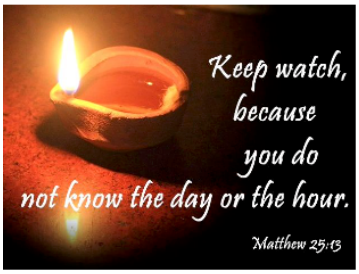
What a dark room needs is not a louder voice. It needs a light. The light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it. But that light has to be carried by someone for the people in your family, your workplace, your neighborhood, that someone is you. Your good deeds produce the light that cannot be dimmed.

Readiness is about what is in our flask. When the foolish asked to borrow the oil, the wise say no. At first, it sounds kind of hard-hearted, doesn't it? But the wise were being honest and practical. Oil cannot be divided at midnight without leaving everyone with just too little and a procession that will ultimately end up in darkness. And that would be a disaster for the entire wedding party. So, the wise are not hoarding their light. They're protecting it so that there is a successful procession of a good wedding. Five lamps that are lit are better than 10 that go out.

` So, spiritual readiness cannot be borrowed. Each of us is responsible then for carrying that flask and keeping it full. So the question the text asks each of us is what good deeds, what spiritual practices are we doing to fill and keep our flasks filled this day?

The moment that divides the wise from the foolish is not the midnight cry nor the closed door. It's that quiet choice that they made hours earlier when the five made sure that they had flasks of extra oil and five who did not. The oil of wise stewardship comes from prayer, regular giving time set aside, sharing resources, and small, faithful decisions that no one sees until it becomes dark.

So, we cannot give anyone our oil, but we can share our light. The parable doesn't show it, but we know it from experience when you light another person's candle from yours. Your flame does not shrink, right? But the room gets brighter. So, keeping your oil is what makes it possible to keep sharing your flame.



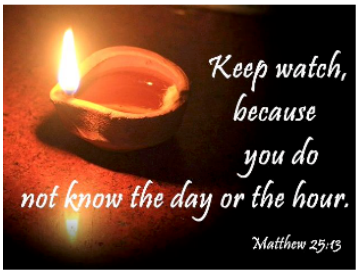
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Now this brings us to Thanksgiving, where we need to fill our flasks with the oil of gratitude starting now, because anxiety looks at the dark and it counts what is missing. Gratitude looks at that same darkness and notices what is glowing, the friend who called, the food on the table, the person who carried you. Gratitude is expressed, for example, in Thanksgiving drives to collect food for the hungry. Giving thanks does not deny the darkness, but it refuses to let the darkness have the last word.

And to be ready, to continue to be ready, right after Thanksgiving comes Advent, and the church does something wise here. It embraces the darkness and does not turn on every light at once, with proper use of our oil. We light one candle the first week, two the second, three the third week, and four on the fourth week, and only then light Christ's candle, the light of Christmas. Advent teaches us to wait in this darkness without panic, trusting that the groom is coming. The light we wait for is the child born in Bethlehem. And to fulfill the prophet's words that the people who walk in darkness have seen a great light.

So, this is why the church sets aside, tries to set aside this early season of November to examine what we have and to be ready to recommit. We are asked to prayerfully consider our commitments for the year ahead, our time, our talents, our financial giving. And it's time to determine how much oil do we have? Check it out and how to obtain more if necessary. This is not just like a fundraising pitch, but as an Advent-shaped question, are we getting ready now, while there's still time?

Remember wise bridesmaids, wise stewards, prepare before the midnight hour. They fill their flasks in the quiet hours. They bring extra oil because they anticipate maybe a delay, and they keep waiting with the wedding party rather than alone. So, now is the hour. Now is the time to prepare and make ourselves ready. So, let us be like these wise bridesmaids and wise stewards of what we have been given, our time, our talents, along with our treasure.



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A church is not an institution that we fund. It's a wedding party that we are called to be a part of. So give thanks for the light within you because there's light there. And gather that oil that is in you, that spiritual readiness, and tend that flame faithfully while you wait and share that flame freely. The wedding is coming, the bridegroom will appear, and there will be shouts of joy. As we prepare for these upcoming seasons, this busy, hectic time ahead of us, keep your oil. Keep it and share the example of your flame and stay ready, amen.