

Who Is Responsible For My Oil?

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 11/08/20

At Crossroads United Methodist Church

Wauakee, WI

The church for which Matthew is writing his gospel is a fledgling community, trying to make it's way with new believers in a hostile world trying to tear community apart. Many of the members of Matthew's community were thrown out of their synagogue and even abandoned by their families.

In front of them is the threat of a hostile empire without the support of a faith community and family. The believers in his church were struggling to survive in that difficult time.

Add on to that, the discouragement that Christ had not yet come as they were expecting.

To address this situation in his church, Matthew remembers and uses a parable of Jesus to speak to that discouragement. The story says that 5 bridesmaids were wise and 5 were foolish. It doesn't say that five were bad and 5 were good.

Otherwise, appearances were the same: same lamps, same dresses, all of them drifted asleep.

I think that Matthew was telling his church and us that the lamp is the outer form; but the oil is the inner fuel.

Today, we hear the language of people's oil running low: "I'm stressed out; I'm burned out; I'm drained; I'm burning the candle at both ends."

Pastors survey by the Fuller Institute:

80% believe ministry negatively affects their family;

50% feel unable to meet the demands of the job;

70% have a lower self-image now than when they started ministry;

70% say they lack someone they consider a close friend;

50% have considered leaving the ministry in the 3 years.

So, is Matthew trying to tell us the same thing that any Boy Scout or Insurance Agent would offer in telling us to "Be Prepared"?

I like it when I'm prepared. All of those times when I felt a little guilty because I realized I was a "get-things-done Martha" and as much a "easy-going Mary."

Today's story about the bridesmaids doesn't really say whether they had any oil at home. It doesn't say if the wise ones were hoarding their oil or if the foolish ones just didn't have time to get to the store yet. For all we know, the wise bridesmaids might have been down to their last flask of oil, while the foolish bridesmaids were sitting on barrels of it. The story doesn't tell us.

The only thing that matters is what they brought with them when they left the house. Maybe this parable isn't about how much oil you have. Maybe this is a story about the oil you carry with you.

So what does this that look like the kind of oil you carry with you? What does it that look like, if it's not a commodity that we buy and sell?

Remember the safety speech we used to hear on airplanes? "In the event of an emergency, oxygen masks will drop from the ceiling; please be sure to secure your own oxygen mask first before assisting others."

If a two-year old doesn't get a nap, she or he is going to crash. If you have worked 80 hour weeks for longer than you care to know, your relationships are going to suffer. You simply can't avoid it.

And they are some kinds of oil you can't borrow from anyone else. A teenager can borrow a friend's homework in order to get by for an assignment, but you can't borrow the hours they spent on studying for the test. You can't ask a friend for the happiness they have in their marriage to use for your

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own.

You have to make sure you have some of that oil – whatever kind it is – for yourself.

BECAUSE YOU WILL RUN OUT. TIME WILL RUN OUT. We all doze. We all put it off. We all catch ourselves snoozing like the 10 bridesmaids.

There will be that time when you need to draw on the oil you have, right there, on your body, in your flask.

And it's not going to come from your pension savings or your long-range plans. It's going to come from what feeds you spiritually right now – where you see God right now.

And where is that? Jesus tells us. I was hungry ... thirsty .. naked ... a stranger ... prison ... sick. That's where we find him. That's where we get our reserves filled up.