

Reserves Matthew 25: 1-13

Pastor Bill Mosley 11-8-20

Two Quaker elders of the old school travelled to a small rural meeting. On the way back it began to snow heavily and their carriage became stuck in a snowbank. The two elders finally made it to a farmhouse just as it got dark, and were welcomed for the night. But the house was cold, and their attic room was like an icebox. The elder of the elders stripped to his underwear and jumped into a feather bed, pulling the blankets over him. The younger elder, feeling a bit embarrassed said, "Excuse me, Friend, but doesn't thee think we ought to say our prayers before retiring.?" The other elder stuck one eye out from under the covers. "Son," he said, "I keep prayed up ahead for just such situations as this, & so should thee."

Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, in his book **Further Along the Road Less Traveled** said he was on a retreat at a monastery and was asked to deliver the homily at the closing service. He agreed. Then he remembered that in most churches one could not preach on scripture one chooses, texts are assigned for the day.

He discovered that the assigned text was on Matthew 25:1-13, the parable of the wise & foolish virgins. He said that this text has always been one of his LEAST FAVORITE scriptures, & he had always avoided it as it caused him great discomfort.

Here are ten bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom to come. Five of them have oil for their lamps; five did not bring any oil. While they were waiting, all of them became drowsy & went to sleep. At midnight a shout rang out that the bridegroom was coming & the bridesmaids were to come & meet him. The five with oil got up & lit their lamps, all ready to go, while the five without oil said, "Hey, share some of your oil with us."

The 5 bridesmaids with the oil said, "No, go buy your own, because if we share there might not be enough for us."

So off the other 5 went to buy oil. While they were gone, the bridegroom came, & those who were ready went into the wedding feast, & the door was shut.

Later the other five came & asked the bridegroom to open the door & let them come in also, but he replied, "I don't know who you are. Be gone with you."

Now, Peck says that the reason he did not like this parable is that it seemed to him to be very unchristian. After all, isn't Christianity about sharing with our fellow human beings? Did not Christ teach us to be unselfish? The parable seemed so unfair, Peck said.

Then, as he was mulling this over in his mind trying to figure out what he would say, Peck says it hit him that this parable is about preparation. We all have to spiritually prepare ourselves for life. No one else can do it for us.

Preparation cannot be shared. We have to prepare ourselves.

Matthew includes 2 parables about a wedding feast in this latter section, The first one is in chapter 22 regarding the spurned invitations and the guest without a garment. Both are about preparation. Being ready.

Matthew asks two questions in this section 1) "When will Christ return?" (Answer: no one knows, but there will be signs) and 2) "What shall we do while we wait?"

This parable answers that question, "Make sure you have enough oil for your lamps." It's olive oil, not 10w40.

There used to be something called a service station. In those days an attendant filled the tank, washed the windows. They'd ask, "Check your oil?" Without a healthy reserve of oil in the crankcase, the engine was a goner. When I was younger, I would change the oil myself.

We had a used gold and tan Suburban, and once I rented a U Haul to move my daughter Julie to Fredericksburg for nursing school.

Right out of the parsonage driveway the car stopped cold and wouldn't move. Got the car towed to the dealership, and the mechanics had it up on the rack. Four guys looking up at the bottom of my car, and one says, there's your problem, the off-brand oil filter. I had never seen that filter. And I instantly knew that was not the problem. I was embarrassed. I had NEVER changed the oil in that car. I had to have the engine rebuilt because I didn't put oil in it.

Faith is like that: We need a reserve to call on when the unexpected happens. Where do we get such a reserve?

Daily prayer and devotion, study of scripture, a place in the community of faith in worship & fellowship. When tragedy strikes – or even unexpected joys, - it's this reservoir of strength we've been building up that carries us through.

The oil needs attention. I am most likely to get in trouble when I deny a need for oil (Spirit /life/ breath) or when I try to be my own oil -- relying on my own inner strength & resources, a popular thing to claim these days. Oil is something outside of myself, but within reach, because God has made it so. It means actively keeping a right "Relationship" with God.

"Building reserves" in our lives is very important.

We build those reserves by choosing to engage in active Spiritual disciplines over all the other choices the world gives us. ..."Why do we have to go to church every Sunday?" It's not a law, but doing it with the right heart we begin to build up those reserves which are there to carry us through when things get wrapped around the axle..."when the bridegroom is delayed."

When crisis hits, people with spiritual reserves are able to go on & celebrate life, while those who have not taken the time to build up reserves are left floundering in the darkness of despair.

This "oil" is a close relationship with God -- the power behind our lives. That oil might "run out." When the bridegroom comes, it is too late to build the relationship. You can't borrow relationship from other people.

Matthew opposes the frantic craving to know about judgment day. He pictures faithful disciples as those who do their duty at appropriate times & are prepared for the Day of the Spirit whenever it comes. Such disciples can sleep in confidence, rather than being kept awake by panicky last-minute anxiety.

But it really isn't the day of the bridesmaids, but rather the day of the bridegroom. He is what the wedding is about. It is His day. He calls the maidens to wait for Him. It's not for Him to arrange his schedule to oblige them.

Five of the maidens prepared to wait. They had made plans based on the fact that it was not their day, but His. It wasn't about them. Their expectations weren't the point.

Greeting the bridegroom whenever he came - that was the point. Whenever he came. Five came expecting the bridegroom to fit into their needs & schedule.

If we know that we have sufficient "oil" in our lives, then we are ready for the bridegroom whenever he might come. That assurance can let us both sleep peaceably & live & serve confidently.

Do what you need to do to be ready. Live as though the bridegroom may come at any moment. Don't lapse in your faith and dedication to the Lord. Don't ever forget that the Lord is coming soon. And keep prayed up ahead.

Lord, keep us ever ready for your return, with reserves of faith in you, hope in your future, and love for your world, that we may say now to whatever makes it more difficult to say yes to you. 1319 words