

## Where's the Oil?

A Sermon by  
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The Gospel lesson—Matthew 25:1-13

25:1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

25:2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

25:3 When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them;

25:4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

25:5 As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept.

25:6 But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'

25:7 Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps.

25:8 The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'

25:9 But the wise bridesmaids replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.'

25:10 And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut.

25:11 Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.'

25:12 But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.'

25:13 Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

**A question popped into my mind** as I read this passage from Matthew's gospel.

I wonder if you wondered about this too.

**Why in the world did five of these young women in Jesus' story run off to a wedding banquet with lamps but no oil?**

I can think of several reasons.

Maybe they were just all excited. So excited that they up and left for the feast without grabbing everything they needed.

Have you ever done that?

When our first child, Sally, was ready to be born in the dead of winter, I bundled up Bonnie and walked her to the car.

I grabbed the suitcase that she had packed for this exciting trip to the hospital.

I went back to close the front door of the house and on my way to the car Bonnie said, “Don, did you 3 forget something?”

I had. I had forgotten my winter coat. It was February 28<sup>th</sup>. In Ohio. Snow was on the ground. It was cold. But I didn’t even feel it. Being excited can cause you to not notice things you should notice.

So maybe these five young women were just overly excited.

Or maybe they knew they were leaving with empty lamps but thought they could stop at a filling station along the way and get them filled up.

I thought that once last summer when I made a trip from Shawnee to Colorado Springs. My gas tank was flirting on too low, but I knew I had enough gas to get there and I planned on filling up before I headed back. Only I forgot to fill up and just above Tarryall Reservoir on CR 77 my low fuel alarm went off.

Now if you know this area, you know the closest gas station north of Tarryall is in Jefferson.

And when I got to Jefferson I had more sweat on my brow than gas in my tank. I coasted in on fumes and put 22 gallons in an 18-gallon tank. I’m still trying to figure that one out, because I didn’t fill up the neck.

So maybe these five young women thought they could fill up on the way.

Except obviously they didn’t do that.

Maybe they were hoping the bridegroom would come and the banquet be held during daylight hours when they wouldn’t need their lamps.

But if this is what they were thinking you have to wonder, “Had they never been to a wedding reception?”

I’ve been going to wedding receptions for over 40 years and not a single one of them ended before dark.

**Now we could go on speculating** about why these young women rushed off to the wedding banquet with empty lamps, but there’s really no need for us to do that.

**Jesus told us why they did it.** He said they were foolish. They were just plain foolish.

**Now I know “foolish” is one of those words** we’re not supposed to use to describe people any more. Words like dumb and stupid and idiot and a bunch of others. These are words that can be said with a mean spirit and they can be hurtful and harmful and demeaning and they shouldn’t be used.

**But the fact that Jesus**, the kindest person who ever lived, used this word “foolish” ought to cause us to take another look at it.

**Jesus wasn’t being mean**, he was just being factual, like when the psalmist wrote “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

**So what does this word “foolish” mean** and why did Jesus use it?  
It means a **failure to exercise good judgment**.

The man or woman who gets behind the wheel to drive home after having **too many drinks** is failing to exercise good judgment. They are being foolish.

The young person who **spends too much time with their Xbox** instead of with their studies is being foolish.

The parent who leaves a **loaded gun lying around** a home where small children are present is exercising terrible and potentially deadly judgment. It’s just plain foolish.

**And maybe if we weren’t so concerned about hurting** somebody’s feelings by calling what they’re doing foolish, we wouldn’t have so many foolish things going on in the world today. But that’s just my hunch.

**This story is one of a series of parables Jesus told** about the return to earth of the Son of Man. And it’s easy to **get caught up in that part** of the story.

**The point of this parable** is not that Christ is going to return, but that you need to live, **continuously preparing**, so that you will **be prepared** when he does return.

I think this is a parable that calls attention to the foolishness of every new generation that comes along thinking that they <sup>5</sup> can run off into adulthood with empty lamps. It’s frightening the <sup>6</sup> proportion of young people today whose lamps are empty.

You and I and the churches of this community have an **unprecedented responsibility** to help today’s young people learn how to fill their lamps—to know why it’s important, where you get the fuel, how you use your lamp once its full and that it’s not just a one time deal. You don’t fill up your lamp and put it away and save it just for emergencies. You use it every day and so you have to keep refueling it.

**We can share Christ** with anyone of any age whose lamp is empty. We can train them in the spiritual disciplines that provide the fuel to keep their spiritual lives burning bright.

**John Wesley** was passionate about helping people become fully devoted followers of Christ. His practical spirituality focused on several spiritual disciplines ordained by God to meet this end.

Kevin Watson, a Wesleyan scholar, summarizes Wesley’s spirituality into three steps:

“The **first step** . . . is to stop sinning, to repent of the things that draw us away from God, to literally turn away from them.”

Wesley called on his followers to have holy conversations as a normal part of their lives.

Holy conversations happen as we draw people into Christian fellowship where telling our stories allows us to know each other and encourage each other to grow in faith and in love of God and others.

“The **second step** is to begin to form habits of holiness that cause us to actively express and grow in our love for others.”

Wesley called these Acts of Mercy--doing good to others. One of his often-quoted maxims is:

“”Do all the good you can, by all the means you can,  
In all the ways you can, in all the places you can,  
At all the times you can, to all the people you can,  
As long as ever you can.”

“And then, then the **third step** is to form those other habits of holiness that cause us to actively express and grow in our love for God.”

Wesley called these Acts of Piety and they include

- prayer,
- searching the scriptures,
- receiving the Lord’s supper, and
- fasting

**What better gift can we give** our young people whose lamps may be empty than a path that leads them to a faith in God through Jesus Christ—a faith that transforms their lives and keeps their lamps full with the fuel that will sustain their spiritual lives.

**I invite you to pray with me** over the coming months that God will help us as a congregation increase our abilities to help young people, whose lamps are empty, learn how to get them filled and keep them filled for life!

Let’s pray: Lord, the task you have given us is beyond our capabilities. Make us able for it by the power of your Holy Spirit working in and through us. Amen.