

Matthew 25 Vs. 1-13 as found in *The Message*

1-5 "God's kingdom is like ten young virgins who took oil lamps and went out to greet the bridegroom. Five were silly and five were smart. The silly virgins took lamps, but no extra oil. The smart virgins took jars of oil to feed their lamps. The bridegroom didn't show up when they expected him, and they all fell asleep.

6 "In the middle of the night someone yelled out, 'He's here! The bridegroom's here! Go out and greet him!'

7-8 "The ten virgins got up and got their lamps ready. The silly virgins said to the smart ones, 'Our lamps are going out; lend us some of your oil.'

9 "They answered, 'There might not be enough to go around; go buy your own.'

10 "They did, but while they were out buying oil, the bridegroom arrived. When everyone who was there to greet him had gone into the wedding feast, the door was locked.

11 "Much later, the other virgins, the silly ones, showed up and knocked on the door, saying, 'Master, we're here. Let us in.'

12 "He answered, 'Do I know you? I don't think I know you.'

13 "So stay alert. You have no idea when he might arrive. The theme for this year's Advent Devotionals from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary is "Expect the Unexpected." The Scripture reading from the 25th Chapter of Matthew presents us with a very good start.

This is a story about a wedding. In these days the bridesmaids carried little oil lamps as part of the procession. These were festive lamps meant to lead the way for the bride and groom. They were also necessary illumination in a time when there was no electricity. You could not have a wedding reception without lamps and the oil to fuel them. In this case the bridal party consisted of ten young women, half of whom Jesus describes as wise, the other half are called foolish. As we all know, the wise are the ones who had not just their lamps but extra oil just in case. For reasons that aren't made clear, the bridegroom is late for the wedding. And after waiting and being bored, the bridesmaids nod off to sleep.

Sometime later they are awakened by the cry, "They're coming, and they're coming." Great – the wedding can begin. But while they have been asleep, the lamps have run out of oil. The wise women refused to share with the foolish, sending the foolish scurrying off to the seven-eleven to buy more oil. They get their oil, rush back to the house, and furiously knock on the door. The groom opens it a crack as he peers out overtop the little security chain. "I'm sorry," he says, "do I know you?" And then the door slams shut. It sends a chill down the spine, doesn't it?

I think that this story is meant to send a chill down our spine. Jesus really wants us to be prepared. None of these bridesmaids were bad people. Half of them simply were unprepared. Jesus tells his disciples to keep watch. You never know when the bridegroom is going to arrive - so be ready.

In our day to day lives and in our faith lives, we tend to get sloppy. At least I do. Getting by seems good enough. Just keeping my head above water seems good enough. I don't usually think to carry extra oil. Literal or spiritual. But in this parable, Jesus calls us to a higher level of consciousness. Think ahead. Read Scripture. Pray. Take time for feeding the spirit. Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with God. Keep your oil reserves full - and then watch, wait, live expectantly. Don't shuffle through life unaware - Look up - and be surprised once again by Christ among us. Expect the unexpected. Come Lord Jesus, Come!

Prayer for the Day

O living Christ – you were – you are – you come. Fill our lamps that we may be prepared for the feast of your reign. Keep us wakeful that our lamps may ever burn. Give us sight that we may recognize you among us. Give us strength to stand in your presence. So may all these things be, through your gracious spirit. Amen.