

Good News for the Foolish

Matthew 25: 1-13

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten young women took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those young women got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ 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. Later the other young women came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

This week I encountered a first. You see, my gas light was on...and as I was making the turn, up the hill into the Costco gas station. It was then the car sputtered, stuttered, and stopped two blocks away from the pump. So there I was blocking one of the lanes with my hazards on, waving cars around me. I tried to stop a few trucks to see if anyone had a gas can on hand, because I just so happened to leave mine at home. Eventually I walked into Costco, bought a gas can, filled it up as I stood in line with all the cars, then filled the car’s gas tank. By that time, however, I had missed my next appointment. It was as if I was living the parable of the ten bridesmaids! I just-so-happened to be one of the foolish ones who ran out of gas.

The truth is, it happens. Sometimes we run out of fuel and burn out. In some cases, it happens metaphorically, or emotionally, or spiritually. In others, such as mine, it happens literally. There are times when our resources are depleted and we begin to get anxious about money or volunteers. Or there are some days we run out of energy. Others we run low on hope. Looking at the conflicts in the middle east and other areas of our world it makes us wonder if things can ever be different. I heard antisemitism is up around the world 350%. The thing is, Islamophobia is up as well. When hate rises in one group, guess what happens? Hate rises in all the other groups as well. The wick for hate is short, and so during these times it is all-the-more important to keep our lamps trimmed and burning. But the truth is, we can run low on patience or courage or faith and, let’s face it: sometimes we are functioning on fumes.

It is no coincidence Jesus tells this parable at the end of his ministry. Anxiety is high. The future for the disciples is unknown. So they want to know in what form and fashion Jesus will return and when. Except instead of saying, “I’ll be back on such-a-such a date,” Jesus tells them a bunch of parables—of course he does! In the parable before this one he contrasts a wise and foolish servant. The wise keep doing the work even though the master is delayed, while the foolish become opportunists: pillaging the master’s resources while turning on each other in violent ways. But in today’s parable the wise came prepared for the bridegroom’s delay while the foolish ones do not. If the bridegroom had only arrived on time, when he said he was going to arrive, there would not be a problem. But he was late! So half the bridesmaids need to siphon a

bit off of the reserves of the other group. Except, the other bridesmaids say, “No, go to the gas station and get your own!” So they do and wouldn’t you know it is then bridegroom arrives. And when the foolish come back from running their errand, they knock on the door, and the bridegroom says, “Sorry, I don’t know you and *you are late for the party!*” So much for the guy taking responsibility for being late! But I mean, yikes! So is the point of the parable to be self-reliant or else we will get locked out of the feast?

But here’s what doesn’t add up. Didn’t Jesus say on the Sermon on the Mount, “Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse *anyone who wants to borrow from you.*” Doesn’t Jesus feed 5,000 and then 4,000 people with depleted resources? And then just a few moments before this parable doesn’t Jesus say, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisee...for you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven.” So either Jesus has had a radical change of heart and is instructing us to do the opposite of everything else he has taught us; or something else is going on.

You see, all ten of the bridesmaids fall asleep waiting. The only real difference between the two groups is that the so-called-wise one are prepared for the bridegrooms *delay*. But notice: the wise are also a bit opportunistic. When the foolish ones run out of oil, the wise are quick to say, “You should go back into town and buy some more.” I mean, isn’t it a bit crafty to make a play on the other group while they are vulnerable? It’s like straight out of an episode of *Survivor!* After all, the foolish ones are already anxious and susceptible to bad advice—which is what happens when we run out of gas! And I’m willing to bet that in their frazzled state, their anxiety only gets worse when the “wise ones” suggest they are going to miss out unless they abort their post and refill their tanks. But what happens? They end up missing out anyways.

So here’s the tragedy of the story: the bridegroom shows up at midnight. Now, how is the bridegroom supposed to get around at midnight? He has to have his own lamp, right? Would not his light be enough for the ones who have run out? If only they hadn’t allowed their anxiety to get the better of them. If only they hadn’t listened to the voices telling them they needed to be self-reliant. If only they trusted that even with their lack, the light of the one coming is bright enough for all of them. And they can relax.

So what if the parable is saying that this kingdom of God thing doesn’t function on a timeline, but a promise. There are moments when justice is delayed and we will run out of hope, or patience, or courage. But during the long delay of God’s promise, do we get anxious? Of course we do! But what do we do with it? Do we listen to others who have the resources and don’t share them—telling us we need to be self-reliant? Or do we trust that even in our lack, the light of Christ is bright enough for all of us? After all, in Revelation 22—the end of our biblical story—it says, “*In the city of God, they will not need the light of a lamp, for the Lord God will provide the light for them.*”

During times of heightened anxiety: as our hearts break during war torn conflicts. As we grow impatient waiting for justice. As we head into a tumultuous election year where there are bound to be moments when we run out of gas. What do we do with our anxiety? Do we grow impatient and resort to violence? Do we listen to the voices telling us we need to be self-reliant? Or do we

remember the good news for even the foolish ones: that God's light is enough. And when it eventually arrives, it is bright enough for all of us. Amen.