

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH  
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NOVEMBER 6, 2011

SERMON: PARABLE OF THE TEN BRIDESMAIDS  
TEXT: MATTHEW 25: 1-13

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 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 bridesmaids 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 bridesmaids 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.”

I love weddings...and I have the best view in the sanctuary. I’ve seen that funny face that grooms make just before they faint. I was there when the best man forgot to bring the rings; when the bride got walnut furniture polish on her dress just before the service; when the ring bearer got scared and said a few words that his parents didn’t know he knew; and I remember the time when after four hours of waiting I had to call the bride and say, “Be here in 15 minutes or I’m sending these people home and locking up the church.” She got there in 10!

I love weddings but this story is not about weddings. It is, however, about a group of bridesmaids who were waiting for a big wedding. Unlike in our modern day weddings, in Biblical times the bridesmaids were the attendants of the groom! Their job was to wait for him and then to escort him into the wedding and process in with their lamps blazing. They provided an honor guard of sorts! Someone has suggested that the bridesmaids were comprised of the groom’s former girlfriends who were either happy or sad to see him wedded. I don’t know about that!

What I do know is that they had to dress up for their part in the wedding. No blue jeans or shorts or tennis shoes. I don’t know exactly what they would have worn and I

doubt that it much mattered but since it doesn't I am going to invite you to picture them like this: 10 curvy girls with their hair in southern beehives with little ringlets , wearing sea foam green taffeta dresses with puffy sleeves and skirts, very low backs, and large black bows acting as belts. Whenever I get boring just close your eyes and try to picture them!

Now, these fabulously dressed young debutants were on time for their assignment and they all remembered to bring their lamps. Can you imagine the excitement that these ten young women brought to their duties and all the giggling and twittering that ensued? But as time when by they began to exhaust all the possible topics of conversation. Silences would descend only to be broken by some bright young woman you introduced a new subject. Eventually all conversations boiled down to this: where was the bridegroom and when would he get there? After a number of hours even that conversation lost its appeal and the young women, one by one, dozed off.

That is when things got interesting!

A cry in the distance...the bridegroom was approaching. Girls jump up, wrestle with their dresses, fluff their hair, and check their lamps! Opps!

All of the girls were running low on oil for their lamps but five of the girls had brought a bit extra, just to be safe. The other five girls were faced with lamps that were about to run dry and go out - a disaster for a bridesmaid!

The five nervous bridesmaids asked the well provisioned bridesmaids if they could have some of their oil. They were rebuffed. If the oil was shared then all ten lamps could go out before the procession was finished! The wise bridesmaids were not willing to risk embarrassment or humiliation since they had planned ahead for just this possibility!

The other girls had to run to an oil merchant. They may have had to get him out of bed to buy the needed oil. Note: they had the money to buy the oil - they simply had not wanted to invest in more oil! Their predicament was one of their own making - they had all the resources necessary but failed to make provision for their part in the great work of the bridegroom.

When they got back with their oil lamps burning bright they discovered that the bridegroom had already come and gone. The other girls had escorted him and joined in his great celebration. When they got to the wedding party they knocked on the door

but they were turned away by the bridegroom's bitter words, "Truly I do not know you!"

How sad! It was not their fault that the bridegroom delayed – no more than it is our fault that the economy is bad.. They had budgeted for his early arrival and that should have been enough but, as the bridegroom said, "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

As you already know, our church is now preparing for another year of faithful ministry in God's name and in Christ's service. We are giving great thought and prayer to the amount of oil that we will need to see us through. And we ask the questions:

Will we be like the wise bridesmaids and have enough oil for the coming year? Will we have enough to shine as a light in the darkness? Will we have enough to warm those who are sad and cold, poor and lonely? Will we have enough to be a powerful witness to the love and grace of Jesus Christ to the people of North Texas?

Or will we be like the foolish bridesmaids, hoping to stretch the meager store of oil that we are willing to invest in God's work – hoping, hoping, hoping that it will last and that the bridegroom will never know that we could have brought more.

Whether we will have adequate provisions to do the ministry which the Lord has assigned to us depends on you! Each of you.

We won't get a government stimulus. There's no bailout for us. We don't qualify for welfare.

God depends – and we depend – on you.

We pray that you will carefully and prayerfully consider how you will respond to all the good things that Jesus has done for you.