All Saints Episcopal Church

Steenrijk

Heelsumstraat at Leidenstraat

The Twenty-fourth Sunday

after Pentecost:

Proper 27A

November 8, 2026

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

“Are We On the Right Way?”

DRAFT

Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus said, "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."

Lord, hear the cries of our lips, and our hearts shall be comforted. Amen.

Give me oil for my lamp, keep it burning, give me oil for my lamp, I say;

give me oil for my lamp, keep it burning; keep it burning ‘til the break of day. Amen.

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How often do we ‘draw a line in the sand’ about what we will do for God? We say, “In God we live and move and have our being”, but when push comes to shove, we beg off doing more than some specified lesser amount for God. For the average Episcopalian, that amounts to far less than a tithe a year of our gross income, and even less of our time. Of the 168 hours per week, how many of us spend 17 hours on godly endeavors? And what about our talents? I heard the pastor of a large church reflect on

how excited one of the men in his congregation was about serving as a parking attendant for their huge church in Illinois; however, in his secular life the man was the president of a multimillion-dollar company. Where were his talents at management, financial investment, and planning put to use for the church? We all fall short in one way or another. What we should try to achieve, however, is a better balance between our non-religious lives and our religious lives. We say we believe this and that about God and Christ, but when push comes to shove, we find a myriad of excuses why our

investment in our faith is not that important after all.

The ten bridesmaids in today's parable were equal as far as we can tell, except in one important detail. Half decided to be well prepared for whatever may come, but the other half did a quick "random act of kindness", filled their lamps once, and called it quits. You may have heard of those "random acts of kindness"--it may be a person who puts coins into a parking meter for someone else so they don't get a parking ticket, or some other single deed of service. It achieves a quick "high" for us that we have done something completely

anonymously, but in a way, it encourages people to seek the thrill of giving and serving sporadically rather than regularly. The act in and of itself is good and selfless, but it can lull us into thinking that that is a sufficient way to plan our future way of acting and doing. We do spur of the moment things, but we are not necessarily agreeable to doing other more sustained types of service. Yet it is service "over the long haul" that commends us to God, our parable for today says. The one "flash in a pan" deed that five bridesmaids did--they only filled their lamps once, but that turned out to be insufficient to carry them to the

finish line, so to speak. They got some distance but then flagged before reaching the end and found they were forever shut out from the presence of the bridegroom.

A friend of mine was quite certain he knew enough about just about everything, including the essentials of his faith. Yet, one evening, after he had broken up with his girlfriend and was walking along a street in Queens. He met a group of followers from Sun Yung Moon's group. He joined them quicker that one can say, "cult" and became willing recruiter for them. He moved into one of their group homes in Queens, and in a very short time he was completely caught up

into their cult. In the following weeks he began trying to attract others into the cult, and because of that he spoke several times to me and to a priest friend of mine, trying to entice us. We realized what had happened, and began on our own to get him back out of the cult, and finally we succeeded. He realized the paucity, the limitation, of his biblical knowledge and immediately decided to take classes in the Bible at a college so he could really become more proficient in his understanding of God's word. His scant knowledge of the word of God had almost been his eternal downfall.

Where are we lacking? How are our children lacking? And how vulnerable are we to being susceptible to fringe groups always trying to win us out of the Christian faith? It is quite a feather in their cult caps when they get a Christian to leave the faith, and, unfortunately, it is not that uncommon. We are far more vulnerable than we realize. And the price of our vulnerability is eternal life without God, a tragic loss.

A close relative of mine was flabbergasted to learn his knowledge of his faith was incomplete. He was highly educated, but not so in the Bible, and found he was actually far closer to being a

Mormon than a Christian. Now he has turned his intellect towards the further study of the Bible to know the various points often slurred by Mormons in a non-Biblical fashion, such as thinking the Son of God was produced by the sexual union of God and the Mother of God, quite a farfetched theology. Other friends of mine have recently become so enamored of other beliefs that they have left their Christian faith, a terrible loss for them, and for us. It is not that difficult to slide into oblivion, and find the door of Heaven shut to us. There are always willing sly tutors to help us stray from the strait and the narrow. One way to

be better informed about the Bible itself is to be a Bible teacher, as teachers have to learn far more than others whom they are teaching. But learning about the Bible is a life-long task. We never know enough. I know one bishop who claimed to have read through the Bible dozens of times, yet his basic understanding was so far off and as a result he was deep into Gnosticism without even realizing it. The gnostics think they have some special knowledge, some clever insights that are actually complete non-Biblical constructs often borrowing from Mohammadism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and a variety of philosophies that are actually anti-

Christian and anti-God. Unfortunately, being a church leader does not immunize us against the cults and non-Christian religions of the world. It takes quite some effort to keep within the bounds of Christianity. No wonder I find parents who seem mystified that their children veer away from Christianity when they themselves have been the source of their own child's downfall. One person I know recently died of a drug overdose ten years after his mother stopped coming to church. She had allowed him to stray away from what would have been his salvation, and a disaster occurred. Unfortunately, it is not that uncommon in

our society to lose one of our young. Another left Christianity after serving in the Army in Iraq with other soldiers who were non-Christians. His Christian faith was limited--his family only came to church occasionally, and the result has been heartbreaking for them. They felt secure in their faith, but a child of theirs has suffered mightily for their laxness in church attendance.

I estimate only about half of those who attend church services on a Sunday actually make a pledge of any amount. It seems that is not on their agenda as being important. If a single dollar could win one's way into

heaven, that would be great, but the cost is far higher, and the benefit is far greater. I hope no one here has the illusion that God can be bought off, as it certainly is failing in the basics of our faith. It is far more serious than you may recognize, so let me warn in the most certain of terms. The faith we proclaim is not a casual faith. It is the faith that will sustain us through thick and thin, through the ups and downs of life. But to do less than our faith requires is to offer lip service to God at the peril of our very souls. The door that the five foolish bridesmaids found eternally closed to them is a door we one day may have to face in our own

eternity. It is a tragedy in the making that I hope no one here will face, but the warning is now and it is definite. Do not stray from your faith. The result is complete and utter disaster. The fall we face will be utterly irreversible. May no one here face the shut door of heaven. Tithing is not the only thing needed, however, we also need to have the deeds of compassion and grace. We are constantly being tested, constantly being lured away, constantly under scrutiny for our faith, believe it or not. The attraction to the "dark side" is immense and equally disastrous. I have unfortunately seen the downfall of someone who only went to a

Broadway play that resulted in their thinking, hey, that lifestyle is for me, and they left their spouse for another. As Nicky Gumble says in the Alpha Bible course, if you are married and see an attractive person and wonder if God is calling you to leave your spouse and take up life with that new person, don't ever think God is calling you into mischief and adultery. It is the devil doing that, so beware. Our society challenges us daily into thinking another pathway is better than the way of Christian faith, but the other pathway only leads to utter destruction. Often, I have seen some take their precious families down that

pathway too, leading all to ruin. Maybe we aren't responsible for many, but we certainly have to answer for our families, and our constant concern about our own spiritual health is just as important as our physical health. We can never ignore our spiritual development regardless of how old or young we are. The consequences are absolutely dire.

Stewardship season is upon us. Here we have a chance to redeem ourselves once again. But here also we have a chance to shirk our responsibility, and our faith, and to tip God, thinking something else in our lives is more important. If that were the case, I

wouldn't be standing here before you, as I am charged with trying to tell you the truth, not to deceive you. If we who are called by the name of Christ forswear our foolish ways and turn back to God, God will hear the urgent prayers of our hearts and will come and heal us. It is a simple and as complex as that.

We cannot think disobeying the Ten Commandments is simply a small deviation in our lives, it is not, and could be our final downfall. So, we must beg God's forgiveness, turn from our foolish ways, as John the Baptist cries in Godspell, and return to the pathway that Christ has laid out

for us. Christ is not devious. Christ is not complex. He is simply calling us to hear his voice, that ever-small voice inside of us, calling us, “O sinner, come home”. Hear his voice today, and answer him with, “Yes, Jesus, I will turn back and follow you every day of my life.”

John Jewitt, a very respected pastor and noted preacher wrote: “When I arrived at the emergency room where the young lad from our Sunday school was in x-ray, a resident was asking the mother if she ‘needed something’ to help her cope. She was shaken -- almost hysterical -- and her husband had not yet arrived from a very late

day at work. The lad's injuries were not life threatening, but they suspected he did have several broken bones.

"When the father arrived, he went through all the usual 'Who -- how -- when – why' kind of questions, held his weeping wife close and then settled into a litany. 'I never took him camping.' His wife began to comfort him. 'It's okay honey. You've been busy. We'll go camping as soon as you have time.' But the father was inconsolable. 'I never took him camping.' Off and on -- over and over during that evening, he kept coming back to this one theme, 'I never took him camping.'

"That experience passed, the boy recovered from his three broken ribs, broken leg and collar bone, and the family life changed. The father turned down a promotion that would have required a cross-country relocation and accepted a salary cut. They do a lot of camping these days and the father reflected on the whole experience with these words. 'I was simply not prepared for the fact that I could lose a child at any time. I told myself there would always be time for camping once I got my career on track. Now I think in terms of the fact that tomorrow is a wonderful promise, but never a guarantee.'"

And Pastor Jewitt concludes: “Whenever someone asks me, ‘When do you think Christ will come?’ I like to answer, ‘Not a moment too soon!’”

Amen.

“Are We on the Right Way?”

Matthew 25:1-13

Proper 27(A)

Description: We have charge of our own lives--where we will go and what we will do. Consider how God is calling us for a special purpose. Listen to the Spirit’s voice.

Tags: Oil, lamp, Episcopalian, tithe, call, vulnerability, drugs, cults, commandments, camping, gnostic, faith