

Sermon, St. David's Episcopal Church. Proper 27A, Matthew 25:1-13 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

“No! There will not be enough for us and for you.”

Isn't that a weird sentiment to hear the Sunday after our pledge ingathering, when we emphasize a theology of abundance? Jesus' parables are so inconvenient sometimes. We have these crucial Christian virtues like sharing, yet here's a parable about five so-called wise bridesmaids who refuse to share, and then benefit from that decision, because they get to go into the wedding banquet while the foolish ones are at the dealer buying more.

What about sharing?

Sometimes as Christians, it may feel like we are called to use ourselves up, to give it *all* away, give and give and give. Scripture tell us to forgive people seventy times seven times; and we are supposed to give up everything to follow Christ. Sometimes reading the Bible, it sounds like we are called to give and give until there is nothing left; until we are just a shell, all dried up.

But that's not exactly the message we hear in this parable. We can't give away more than we have.

There wasn't enough oil left to light all the lamps.

This parable of the ten bridesmaids is about the second coming of Christ. Maybe the second coming of Christ sounds like something Episcopalians don't have to believe in. Maybe it sounds like something wacky out of the book of Revelation, which we don't read very often in here.

But the second coming of Christ is something that we often pray about in here. It's in our Eucharistic prayers: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will *come again*.

In the Episcopal church, we pray what we believe. The second coming might sound a little out there; but we pray about it, which means we believe it. Jesus is coming back.

Keep awake, for we know neither the day nor the hour.

Staying awake is exhausting. I was getting sleepy last week when I was writing this sermon, in fact, and was doing that thing where you almost nod off but catch yourself. I've never been a parent, but one of the things I hear about most when someone has a newborn is the lack of sleep, the utter exhaustion.

We can't live like that forever. Sleep is a health issue. Not sleeping can lead to forgetfulness, make us gain weight—even cause skin problems. Lack of sleep leads to accidents. It's dangerous.

If we never sleep, we are not going to be of any use to Christ when he comes back. We won't be able to trim our lamp. If we give all of our oil away, there won't be enough to sustain the light.

Notice that in this parable, all the bridesmaids fall asleep. “All of them became drowsy and slept.” Jesus isn’t asking us in this parable to keep awake always, to never sleep or rest and therefore get into accidents and gain weight. Jesus isn’t asking us to give it all away until we are an empty shell.

He’s asking us for faithfulness. For faith. Keep awake.

Keep awake, even one week after fellow Christians were murdered in their church home.

Keep awake, even one month after the mass shooting at a music festival in Las Vegas.

Keep awake. Keep the faith.

Keep awake, even as our country is so divided about how to address this violence.

Keeping awake doesn’t mean exhausting ourselves, trying to be perfect Christians. The wise bridesmaids replenished their oil. They weren’t just prepared for the bridegroom—that is, for Jesus—they were prepared for him to be late.

I hate late. Any of you who have know me for a month or more know that I abhor tardiness. We start our services on time. Late acolytes or deacons can just meet us up front.

I go to great lengths to be on time. I am one of those tiresome people who insists on arriving at the airport absurdly early. I’ve been there before the ticket counters were open, to make sure I made an early flight. I hate being late.

The bridegroom in this parable was late. Many of us think Jesus is late, too. It’s a mess here on earth. When’s he going to come again and sort it out and save us?

Keep awake, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

We Christians are called to be generous, to share, to forgive. We are not called to exhaust ourselves and give everything away. In our pledge campaign, we dreamed about the next fifty years for St. David’s. I didn’t hear anyone say in their talks that their dream for us as a church family was to become tired and poor.

We are called to share the light of Christ. How do we do this without exhausting ourselves? How do we visit those in prison, feed the hungry, and welcome the stranger, when we have limited time and resources? How do we support those in our church family who are sick and who are grieving?

How do we replenish our oil?

As the rector here, I hope that one way you replenish your oil is by coming to St. David’s, by hearing the word of God. At the later two services, by listening to beautiful sacred music. We had a toddler named Caiden at the 9 o’clock last week. Caiden loves music, and every time the

choir finished singing, we could all hear him say “uh-oh.” Clearly Caiden gets his oil replenished by music.

And so many of us get our oil replenished by having little ones like Caiden, and all those in toddler corner and on the Red Carpet: many of us get our oil replenished by having those precious little ones with us here in this sacred space, learning about Christ and preparing for the future, including the second coming.

I pray that our time together on Sunday morning lifts us up so that we are strengthened to go out into the world and reach out to others, as well as those sitting next to us or across the aisle this morning.

I look forward to having a labyrinth outside in the coming months as a place where many of us will replenish our oil, prayerfully walking in pilgrimage.

Cultivate practices that help you replenish your oil, so that you can keep the faith, the light of Christ, in dark times. Maybe for you it's getting outside and spending time in nature. Maybe it's reading or writing. Movement. Maybe you replenish your oil by reaching out to others.

The world can be a dark place, and we are called to brighten it; but we can't give away what we don't have. We must replenish our oil. How do you do that? How can you help others to replenish their oil?

What do we need to do together to keep awake?