

Ready oil      Matthew 25:1–13      Pentecost 23    Nov. 8, 2020

For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.... Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. Matthew 25:1–13-4, 13 Ready with oil

Brothers and sisters in Christ, when the USS Trepang, my submarine, got back to our home port, it was a joyous time. Family would come to the dock to meet us. Now there wasn't always a lot of time to get ready. We were in the military, and operational security could keep us from having a set schedule people could see. Sometimes there was less than a day, and the wife's phone chain was busy. But particularly after a long 6 month deployment, wives and children got dressed up. They displayed banners and signs. They were ready and welcomed us home, and we tried to get done quickly and not have duty the first day back. The submarine is never left unmanned. So we tried to not have duty so families could unite, so we could be together.. At least most of us.

But there were few sailors who volunteered for duty the day we came back. They had no family or friends there to greet them, so they helped out by volunteering for duty. They kept the submarine ready, but no one was ready for them.

There is a lot to be ready for with a submarine, but today we will talk about being ready for someone to arrive.

Jesus talks of this in his parable of the 10 virgins, who were to meet the bridegroom. These 10 are part of the bridal procession and the wedding was a big production with a lot to get ready. Some things never change. Now these 10 took their lamps to greet the bridegroom and walk with him - they were ready. But not all were ready with oil. The five foolish took no oil for their lamps. And when the bridegroom was delayed, and arrived at midnight and they trimmed their lamps, they saw they were not ready with oil. They tried to beg and borrow, and then went to buy oil, but they were too late. The wedding went on, and they missed the celebration. In fact, Jesus' words do condemn them. When they got back and said, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' The Bridegroom, Jesus, answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

Jesus tells us, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." He tells us to be ready for his return.

But what does it mean to be ready? We will get there, but we will start with what it does not mean. We will consider 3 types of not ready.

One is they don't know. If the phone tree didn't contact a wife, she wouldn't know the submarine is coming back. If we don't share the word of God with those who have not heard it, how will they believe? How will they be ready for His return if they never hear that Jesus died to forgive their sins, rose to give them life, and returns to take them home. This isn't the lack of readiness in the parable, but God will hold us, not them, to task if we don't share the word of Christ that gives life to them.

But there is a second not ready, at least not ready with oil. We will call this preoccupied. Sometimes my wife tells me we need to go at 5 to make it to dinner, and I tell her I am ready. And I think I am, as I keep reading the paper or a book or watching TV. Or maybe writing the

sermon or getting a run in or mowing the lawn. And when 5 comes, I can't find my keys. Or my wallet. And I need to find them. I think I am ready, but I was so busy with other tasks I wasn't really ready.

And we might say you had one job to the virgins. Have oil in the lamp. How foolish they are! And yet how often we are distracted by the tasks of this world so that we ignore being ready for the kingdom. There were some wives who said they needed to work or were gone visiting friends when the sub came back. They said they were ready, but they looked no more ready than those who never heard the news. They were marked off as knowing the sub was back. But they showed they didn't care. Are we so different, when we say we believe, but do we check the oil? How foolish.

And there is a third not ready - the one that was ready once. When the pandemic hit, we were very concerned about ventilators and N-95 masks. And the government had some - it was ready. Except they hadn't been checked in 10 years. And some were expired, and some did not work. And this is not about blame, because I have gotten the aspirin out of the medicine cabinet only to wonder if I should take it if the shelf date was 3 years ago. This can happen particularly if I stored something away for an emergency. And maybe a wife thought she was ready because she could just wear the same dress and use the same sign as last time. But maybe she lost weight and maybe the sign ripped last time. And maybe the virgins thought they were ready because they had oil 3 years ago. And maybe we think we are ready because we are baptized and confirmed. And those are great gifts. But do we still live in those promises or do we let them grow old? Is the oil still ready?

So what does it mean to be ready - it means to have faith. It means to have a living active faith. It means to have a faith that is fed by word and sacrament. It means to have a faith that . The way to make sure you have emergency supplies is to buy new and use the old supplies - don't just keep a store and never touch it. It means living in anticipation of that arrival so that we don't start looking for faith when we hear the bridegroom has arrived. It means we let his return, the culmination of his salvation, be central in our life, more important than our books or hobbies, yard work or jobs. We still do all those, but in support of his return. And if we find that God is not in how we use our money or time or talents, we go back to word and sacrament to remind ourselves what God has done and promised. We let God give us the oil so that we are ready. And we use it in our daily life as we share the word and serve our neighbor.

So be ready. The sub came back each time. The Lord comes back surely. Remain in word and sacrament. Practice that word in your life. Pray daily. And be ready for the Lord's return.