Preparing for the Lean Years
Rev. Terrance A. Jacob on Matthew 25:1-13 at SALC, 11/8/2026

Medical professionals in the area ageing – they are actually called "Ageing Specialists" (who knew) tell us that to have a healthy life as a senior, we need to eat right, exercise, have regular checkups, avoid sugar, avoid processed food, etc. I know some of you say, "What's the point, right?" I won't reveal my vote on that – your vote is your secret, we are told! Ageing Specialists say we have to prepare for later years. Read and take up interesting past-times, they say. Exercise the mind. Take care of the body AND take care of our finances. We have to prepare for later time, because we do not know when we will lose some of our faculties or have our health compromised. They advise us to take 20-30-min. walks 4 times a week. Now that is doable, right. Yeah right! The point I'm making is that we need to be prepared for the times to come – the specific reality of ageing. And we have to embrace it gracefully and without being surprised. Now if you are younger and think this does not apply to you, watch out – you time is nearer than you think!

The 10 bridesmaids knew that a time was coming for a specific reality. They should not be surprised. The reality is that a bridegroom was coming. The bridesmaids, in the Jewish tradition of that time were to greet the bridegroom as he and his party entered the path to the house. Some say it is when he is coming to meet the bride. So they are a welcoming party. They are the servants of the bride. The wedding date was set and the arrival was expected. Maybe not the exact time, but it was happening!

So the bridesmaids needed to anticipate that. They had to also prepare for contingencies, like a delay in arrival, even if they did not know what would delay him. Who knows, he may be on his 20 min walk, (see I said 20) or more seriously, he may be doing his prayers.

Jesus is that bridegroom, and the bride is the Church, that is in modern interpretation. But seen from the Jews' point of view – as you heard last week and the week before, Matthew was addressing the Jews – Jesus was pointing out the fact that the Jews knew and believed the messiah was coming. The Samaritans, those who were disowned by the Jews as not "pure-Jews" but mixed race, also believed that the Messiah was coming. They were both anticipating it, but they were not preparing for it. There is a difference between knowing, even believing in the coming of the messiah, and preparing as one waiting. John the Baptist had come and prepared the way in their recent days. But they were not preparing in obedience to the Scriptures. They had their own timeline and assumptions about who the bridegroom was, how he will come and when he will come. They were busy creating their own set of religious rituals, when the expectation of the bridegroom was that they simply have oil so that their light would be burning.

In the marriage festival the bridesmaids needed to keep their torches burning so that the way would be visible at the completion of the journey. It was to help the bridegroom get to the bride, but it was also to make sure the bride is found and found to have her party prepared.

The Jews at the time were too busy polishing the silverware in the synagogue, worshiping the Sabbath and worshipping the temple. If we cannot meet in the synagogue, we cannot connect with the savior, they thought. If we cannot do the religious rituals, we cannot be ready. The prophet Isaiah said to Israel, the people of God at the time, that they were to be the light to the nations. Showing the world the way to God. When our light is not burning it shows we are not trying to get the Messiah to connect with the people whom God has chosen to be the church – not the building but the body – the bride! In the Amos reading today, we will see what God thinks of religion and spiritual ritual, compared to what God things of being light or reflecting Christ's light in the world. God says, "I don't care about your rituals and sacrifices."

Well, The Lord actually says, "I hate" your festivals and rituals. Is God saying we should not have church – I know some of you are saying, "Yay God!". No. God is saying that all that is worthless if I don't see the light in you. How? Work for justice and righteousness wherever you are planted. "But let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." We cannot sit or walk by when people are suffering and weighed down by unjust systems.

Our witness as Christians, even when we are busy – too busy – or whene we are under pressure are not to be put on hold. We are still those who light the way of the messiah to the church (with the big C) – the global church, the holy church catholic. Those that are disciples and those who yet to be called. That church is still forming. The bride is still getting ready, as always. We are to be lighting the way, because the bridegroom, the messiah is here.

Salvation by grace through faith is not put on hold and is not dependent on rituals and programs. We draw people to Christ, not to religion. We live as ready bridesmaids and groomsmen of Christ and His body, celebrating the Wedding feast of grace when, in small ways, we tell and live the Gospel, when we live as a body of Christ. Reaching others in need. When we engage the world - people on the street, in school, at work, in the doctor's office, in the drive through or at the restaurant - we can show ourselves to be prepared to serve the Bridegroom by how warm, welcoming and hospitable we are. When we talk on the phone, send a text message or an email, connect of video chat or Zoom with each other, as we do, we can be kind, we can share joy – or if you are not feeling joyful, listen to the hearts of others.

The 5 foolish bridesmaids were busying themselves with their own lives, their own desires, their own whims and fancies. The wise ones may have been busy too, but they had their priorities right. They were clear about their purpose as bridesmaids. They honored the bride and

groom, but making sure they had oil. That their lamps were burning. Are yours?

God provides that oil for us who are living in the "new dispensation" of the Messiah. God, the Holy Spirit keeps our lamps burning, even if it is sometimes just flickering. Like now when there is so much strife, uncertainty and just stress in the world – election season is stressful, but I won't go into that – not today, at least! For many of us, the lamp/ the torch may not be burning brightly. But that's okay. Many want to make it look like its burning brightly, and that we have enough oil. They smile and say, "God Bless you. Have a nice day or God is good." While their lamps are out. There's no fake it till you make it.

How do we always have enough oil? How do we prepare for the contingencies of life? Like the Ageing Specialists say to us "prepare now." So for us in the bridal party: Feed your soul, keep spending time with God, being a witness to others, reading your bible, even spending the short time with God and wholesome faith in Christ – not watching the fake tele-evangelists who want you to buy their books and "sew" into their kingdoms. Fill yourself with wholesome faith and live it out loud today, so when the trying times come, when life requires us to shine most for Jesus, even after being up all night, we will be ready.

Feed your soul now, so that when you are losing your faculties, you still are able to focus on Jesus. What a blessing it is to hear someone close to death say, "I'm ready to be with Jesus" – even as they are experiencing pain. Not everyone can say that, I mean really say that with hope and not with defeat. I have heard some in their old age or on death beds simply wish for death. But those that have the oil from the Spirit, don't wish for death, they long for eternal life with Christ. So here's the thing about those with hope: even at that time of frailty their lamps shine, lighting the way for us all to prepare as they had for the eternal bridal feast. By God's Grace, we too can prepare and be prepared. Amen.