**22 Pentecost, Nov. 9, 2014,Josh 24:1-2,14-25; Ps 78; 1 Thes 4:13-18; Matt 25:1-13, Rev Mary S. Trainor**

Are you wise or are you foolish? This is the question that our Gospel challenges us to face today. Even though this is an either or question, most of us would respond: "a little of both." Few of us are totally wise or totally foolish, we have our times when we are full of wisdom and we have our times when we do foolish things. Oh, we do understand living with the consequences of being foolish, for we all have had to deal with the humiliation of things like dented fenders and or loss of money because of bad decisions or having to apologize over and over because we hurt someone we love or running out of gas when you are taking people somewhere. Oh yes, we understand what it means to be foolish.

In today's Gospel parable, which is full of imagery, we heard about ten people (who symbolize us): "***Five of them were foolish, and five were wise***." Foolish here, in the Biblical context, actually means even more than in our understanding of the word -- because its definition includes the ignoring of **God's** Word and rules. A foolish person, in the Biblical sense, ignores knowledge God gives and relies on his/her own self. The ten were waiting to light the way for the bridegroom (who is Jesus)....but He was delayed. While waiting, they went to sleep and some ran out of oil for their lamps (like batteries for flashlights), others were well equipped, they had brought extra. The ones "***who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet"*** (that is, they got to go to heaven). Those who were not prepared, the door was shut to them.

Jesus is coming again. We proclaim in our Eucharistic Prayer the mystery of faith: *Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again*. We don’t know when Jesus is coming back, but it is promised, it will happen; we need to be ready for this grand event to happen anytime. What is it going to be like when Jesus comes? We are told in our 1st Thessalonians reading today: "***The Lord himself...with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever***." Wow! Amazing! Oh yes, we need to be prepared to meet Jesus. Jesus tells them back then, and us today, "***Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.***" The phrase "keep awake" does not mean "don't sleep," rather a better translation is "be prepared." The issue is will we be prepared?

My stepfather, Bud, was a wonderful man. He was kind, gentle, caring, incredibly generous. He and my mother had both been widowed, and they were happily married to each other when they were in their 70s. Bud's dad lived to be 105, and Bud was in great shape himself. In fact, Bud lived everyday making decisions based on the assumption that he would live to be 105. It looks now like my mother might live that long, but things did not work out that way for Bud. When Bud was in his early 80s he and my mother were staying in a Canadian cabin with no electricity or plumbing. One day, while working outside, he got lightheaded and acted funny -- so my mother took him on the long trek to see the Doctor in the nearest town. The echocardiogram revealed a fatal aneurysm; Bud was soon to die. They immediately headed back home to Milwaukee. I spent time with Bud soon before he died, and even then Bud was in disbelief that his time had come! He still clung to the belief he was going to live for many more years. He was supposed to live to be 105, after all! Bud was not prepared.

So, the issue is not "if" we should be ready or not....the issue is "will" we be ready. In today's parable, the delay is the test; how do we use our time while we wait? Hmmm. We don't deal with either waiting or uncertainty very well, do we? We get fed up or lazy or put our focus elsewhere, and then get caught unprepared. It is easy to become complacent. Church and prayer can become humdrum -- routine, even mechanical. And hey, it has been > 2000 years since these words were said so we can be slackers, can't we? No. We are to live everyday with enough oil in our lamps.

So, what does this actually mean, to have enough oil in our lamps? What is the oil and how do we get it? The oil is what causes our lamps to burn brightly with Christ's light. When we are actively seeking Christ through prayer and worship and Communion and study and service, our lamps are full of oil. This is not about earning God's love, for that is a given, but it is about being faithful to God's call on our lives. We are to live with a consuming love of Jesus. We are to live with a constant attitude of gratitude to God for what He has done for us. In our Old Testament reading today Joshua says to the people, "***choose this day whom you will serve***" and they later say, "***we will serve the Lord?***" This is what we are to do too: live into this decision every hour of every day. Some people think that if they hang out or live in the same house with someone who is close to the Lord, who has lots of oil and is prepared, their holiness will rub off by association - and so they don't have to fill up their lamps with oil. Nope; not so. We see in the parable that we **each** are responsible for getting ready to meet the Lord. This parable seems harsh, but we are to remember that this is not a true story - and that Jesus is telling it to make a point, to get our attention, to have us prepare. Preparedness cannot be transferred; it takes intentionality and effort on our part. We are to live aware that we will be judged by God, Jesus is coming again, and we don't know **when** that will be.

"Give me oil in my lamp keep me burning".... is a well known hymn by A. Sevison based upon this Gospel parable. It actually is really helpful here, both in filling us with oil and as a reminder. You have the words as an insert in your bulletin today - let's sing verse 1 and the refrain now:.

1 Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning. Give me oil in my lamp, I pray. Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning.  
Keep me burning till the break of day.

Refrain: Sing hosanna, sing hosanna, sing hosanna to the King of kings! Sing hosanna, sing hosanna, sing hosanna to the King!

2 Give me love in my heart, keep me sharing. Give me love in my heart, I pray.  
Give me love in my heart, keep me sharing. Keep me sharing till the break of day. (Refrain)

3 Give me joy in my heart, keep me singing. Give me joy in my heart, I pray.  
Give me joy in my heart, keep me singing. Keep me singing till the break of day. (Refrain)

4 Give me faith in my heart, keep me praying. Give me faith in my heart, I pray.  
Give me faith in my heart, keep me praying. Keep me praying till the break of day. (Refrain)

Keep this. Take it home. Post it on your refrigerator. Sing it, and be reminded to put effort in everyday to fill yourself up with Christ - and then let His light shine through you. You have been invited to the wedding banquet, and there is nothing more important in your life. Amen.