

# Sermon: Advent I

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November 12, 2017

Year A  
Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16  
Psalm 70  
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18  
Matthew 25:1-13

And so we begin another seven-week Advent... a Christian Rosh Hashanah of sorts... another new church year... we say *No, Thank You* to Christmas music before All Hallows Eve... All Saints' Day... All Souls' Day... and even Thanksgiving... we reject culture's rush to Christmas morning... we pray our myopic vision... be expanded... from focusing on the manger only... to seeing the fullness of God's vision... and we don't wait until December 24 to begin our preparations... ours are preparations which move from partying to penitence... from revelry to reverence... from opening Christmas presents... to opening our hearts... from being fed at dining room tables... to being fed at this Table... and we seek not just our own wisdom... but God's Wisdom...

You may remember that *sophia*... is the feminine form of *logos*... Wisdom and Word... both were in the beginning with God... and while our first reading today... consistently depicts Wisdom as *she*... we know that Wisdom is nether male nor female... and we are wise enough to know... that the paths on which Wisdom meets us are our own life's journeys... Wisdom meets us in the thoughts of our minds... and the gate at which Wisdom sits... is our own heart...

One thing I enjoy about preparing sermons... is learning about the origins of words... in our Gospel reading today... we're told that five of the bridesmaids were foolish... the Greek word is *mah-reh*... and from it we get the word moron... and we're told that five were wise... but the Greek isn't *sophia*... it's *phronimos*... and it's a different kind of wisdom... less archetypal and more concrete... less conceptual and more street-smart... less ethereal and more earthy...

The parable calls those who did not bring flasks of extra oil... morons... and calls those who brought extra flasks of oil... wise... the ten of them were invited to a wedding... probably an afternoon affair... why any of them even brought lamps is a mystery... the Bridegroom ought to have been on time... and they all would have been home before darkness settled in over the Judean hillsides... but the Bridegroom was delayed... we're not told why... dusk approached... they lit their lamps... maybe sent someone out for pizza... and as the minutes ticked by... five of the lamps began to flicker out... *may we please have some oil from your flasks...* they asked... *please with a cherry on top...* *we don't want to look bad when the Bridegroom comes...*

*No... you may not...* the haughty... well-lit young bridesmaids said... *there's not enough to go around... go find a convenience store and get some of your own... if there are any open this late... out here in the middle of nowhere... in the dark... Judean... hill country...*

Like many of Jesus' parables... there's more than one way to shine a light on... sorry... to understand this one... maybe the wise young bridesmaids... were selfish young bridesmaids... who didn't understand the Christian virtue of sharing... of realizing that we're all in this together...

Maybe the oil represents the Wisdom they've gained... and much as they'd like... there's just no way to do a Vulcan mind-meld or a wifi data-dump... to share what they've learned...

Or maybe the foolish bridesmaids weren't really foolish... again I have to ask... if you've been invited to a wedding... and you think you'll be home by sunset... maybe... you'd bring an oil lamp that's been filled... just in case... on the way home... you decided to stop for a falafel... but would you bring an extra flask... wouldn't that be more bother than it'd be worth... how could you possibly need all those extra hours of light for 2:00 nuptials...

And maybe the wise bridesmaids weren't just wise... maybe they were neurotic over achievers... anticipating every unlikely eventuality... packing the van with every conceivable thing they might need... for a trip to the grocery store... toting around a bag of road salt in the summer and beach chairs in the winter... I mean... you never know... right...

Or maybe there's a deeper meaning here... maybe the thing that makes the foolishness of the wise bridesmaids... actually wise... is that things do go wrong... maybe the thing that turns their foolishness into wisdom... is that although we count on God to run creation in a respectable way... what we think of... as respectable... God doesn't always accommodate our desires... doesn't always honor our plans... doesn't always give us what we want... or sometimes even need... just ask Job... maybe the thing that makes the foolishness of the wise bridesmaids... actually wise... is that every Advent... as Robert Capon writes... we wait in faith that everything around us ceases to matter... and we are able to lay hold of the reconciliation that lies below the mess of human history... because if Jesus finally does deliver on his promise to draw all to himself... if the reconciliation really is ours... no matter what our sins... then all we need is the faith to accept the reconciliation... no questions asked... from the hand of the One who brings it... no questions answered... and that's an enigma... shrouded in mystery...

But if we accept this... then we must also acknowledge... that no amount of wick trimming... no amount of good works... no calendar full of meetings... and all the brilliant steps that might be taken to make a properly designed operation run even better... all the vain wisdom of the world... is irrelevant... God invites us into relationship... and we must say *yes*... or say *no*... but we cannot say *maybe* forever...

And since faith is something we do in real life... and since Wisdom sought is Wisdom found... we must ask... how do we respond to the social injustices around us... how do we respond to the inequities in caring for the poor... in legal protections for LGBT folk... in how we respond to Houston and to Puerto Rico... in providing health care for those

with pre-existing conditions... in enacting common sense background checks for gun purchases... in legislating just immigration reform... all free of partisan influences... what do we need so that we as lamps burn brightly... what do we need to wake up... how do we need to be oiled... what in us needs to be loosened up... so that like the Tin Man... we open up our corporate hearts...

I want to end with a poem that entered my ears and heart this week... it's called Olive Oil — Extra Virgin... by Maren Tirabassi

It doesn't make me feel any better  
that four of my friends  
are out here with me  
on the other side of the wall  
from the music.  
It was my oil, my light,  
and I squandered it  
on terribly important committees  
(well, everyone said they were),  
and those jobs that could not be done  
by anyone, but indispensable me,  
on rising early for the telephone,  
and staying up late  
to answer the email.

And my lamp burned out  
before I figured out a few things  
that really matter,  
before I spent time,  
lovely time,  
with the folks

who are worth my waiting,  
long before the door opened  
on the party in my life.

Of course, I don't blame the  
other guests --  
the ones doing the Macarena,  
crunching candied almonds,  
catching the bouquet.  
No one can give another person  
oil at midnight,  
everyone's lamp burns out alone  
but I wish I'd saved enough, for dancing.

Today we begin Advent... Behold... the Bridegroom comes...

Mike+