

I am a child of the 1980's, which means that I had to learn about the "Energy Crises" of the 1970's from my high school history textbook. And I remember this picture used to illustrate the oil shortages of that time: cars lined up at a gas station-- a gas station in a desert setting, no less-- people standing in sweltering heat outside their cars to illustrate the depravity and drama of the 1970's energy crisis.

I called to mind that picture of cars in line in a barren land when reading the gospel this week: a storage of oil, not enough fuel, lamps that run dry when they need to be lit. Because what is the bridesmaids' predicament if not an Energy Crisis.

The parable concerns bridesmaids *who had oil* but then ran out. The parable addresses the people who may have never expected to find themselves in an energy crisis; and, like the energy crises of '70s, there doesn't seem to be much they can do about it.

Perhaps you can relate. Maybe you were there forty years ago, waiting in line for your gas rations. But even if you weren't there then, perhaps you can think of other ways of running low on fuel of a different kind:

You thought you'd be healthy forever but now you're looking at a chronic condition. You thought you'd be young and vital still at your age, but you find yourself tired and stretched thin by the end of the week.

Maybe we were thinking the 401K, or the college fund would last longer, the mortgage would be paid off by now, there'd be plenty of people or

family around to help. But the oil has run out. Here you are in an energy crisis.

Many see the mainline church of today in an energy crisis. Sunday worship attendance is in decline. The rolls are full, but the committees are bare. There are fewer people but there's not less work so volunteer *burnout* becomes imminent if not a reality. The demands of our professional and family lives become so great, that participating in Christ's community is more like something we run to do urgently in the middle of the night than a pre-prepared source of fuel for living. It's an energy crisis.

Back in the parable, the PROBLEMS are clear: the wedding party shows a lack of preparation AND an inability to share. As a CONSEQUENCE, group loses focus. They forget why they're waiting and whom they're waiting for. All ten lose track of the bigger picture and larger purpose. They all make the foolish decision that having 10 lamps worth of oil is more important than sticking together, welcoming the bridegroom, and participating in the feast.

And so, it is with us, with the church: we fail to prepare properly, and we hoard our personal resources and we too run out of oil. So, we lose track of what we're doing and lose sight of the God we're waiting upon. Burnout is real. Energy crises happen.

But once we're out of oil, it does no good to beat ourselves up about our lack of preparation. It does us no good to anxiously seek the quick fix. We have to pause and ask what we do now that we find ourselves in an energy crisis.

The best thing we can do is to remember, remind each other, and let God remind us whom we're expecting and why we've come with our lamps anyways.

As people in an energy crisis, our primary concern is and must remain to be Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, the bridegroom who will probably not care that the path is only half as bright as it could have been as long as many bridesmaids as possible are waiting.

We must remember that we're the wedding party for Jesus Christ: who will still make a way even if our lamps are half the number they were before.

We are working here with Christ, the bridegroom whom *we can ask* for more oil instead of running off; the one who *shares his oil* if another has none; the one who has invited us to the feast in the first place.

The way out of the Energy Crisis is point to Christ, the Light of the World.

For while oil may be a finite material in the world, oil is a renewable resource in the life of Christian faith. For our lamps of faith run on a regular share of God's grace, which is never in short supply. And we replenish our lamps with the oil of God's grace every time we confess our sins and remember the forgiving waters of our baptism.

We restock the oil of God's grace by eating the bread of life and drinking the cup of salvation at the table and feast which the Bridegroom has prepared right here.

We refill our lamps by gathering regularly in this place to pray for the kingdom of heaven to come and to hear the Scriptures promise about God catching up the whole world together, renewed and remade, at the eternal wedding banquet.

Yes, our lamps run on the energy of God's grace in Christ, which is never in short supply.

After this worship service, we will meet, as a congregation, for our annual congregational meeting. And if you didn't already know, you'll realize that we're in a bit of an Energy Crisis here at LCOS. All ten of our lamps had oil once but now some--maybe even most--are running out.

As we listen, vote, pray, and consider our individual lamps in the assembly here, may we also remember the oil we DO have and which we, as a church, will always have. We have the oil of Jesus Christ.

And having Jesus Christ, we have hope. The church does not grieve as others who have no hope but believes that because Jesus died and rose again, God will, through Jesus, bring us through this Energy Crisis.

So, we need not run out in the middle of the night. We need not wait endlessly in line at the gas station in some barren land. The Energy Crisis need not be our regular reality. For we have Jesus, the light of the world, fuel enough for all our lamps.

AMEN.

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Lutheran Church of Our Saviour

North Chesterfield, Virginia

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Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost

Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16

Wisdom of Solomon 6:17-20

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13