

# Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

## AN ENERGY CRISIS DIVERTED

Matthew 25:1-13

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

1Jesus said to the disciples, "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; 4but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. 6But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. 8The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9But the wise replied, 'No! There will not be enough for you and us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' 10And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. 11Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' 12But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' 13Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

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## DIAGNOSIS: An Energy Crisis

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) :** *Hoarding*

## *Energy*

In this parable/allegory, ten bridesmaids wait with excited anticipation for a bridegroom's arrival, at which time the banquet will begin. Their anticipation mirrors our natural human tendency to look towards the future and live for that future, expecting something marvelous to come along—be it a husband or retirement or global peace. We assume that that golden future, and/or the one who makes it happen (a groom, a messiah), will resolve our problems and conflicts, replacing them with everlasting happiness and prosperity. In the meantime, we expend our energies preparing for that coming, but inevitably our energy runs out. Even the five wise maidens know their supply is limited. “There will not be enough” (v. 9); they say to explain why they can't share. Not only is fuel limited, but it has the potential to consume its user; we use expressions like “crash and burn” or “burning our candles at both ends” to describe our frantic lives.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : Perishable Energy**

An energy crisis looms. Truth is, all ten bridesmaids (let's call them human sinners) are using perishable, non-renewable fuel. Although five have been wiser in their usage, they too ultimately need to replenish their supply. For a modern analogy, think of wind energy as being renewable, while fossil fuel (oil) is non-renewable. Non-renewable energy runs on itself, relies on its limited fuel stores. Call this limited energy the Law; Law-energy is non-renewable in that it consumes itself and, furthermore, its users are incapable of seeing its limits. In light of this truth, you could say that five bridesmaids are sinners who admit the truth about their finite resources, while the foolish five deny that truth.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : Terminal Energy**

Inherently, non-renewable energy consumes itself and vanishes.

When the bridegroom arrives, he just doesn't recognize the foolish five maidens who have run out of oil. He tells them, "truly I tell you, I do not know you" and shuts the door on them (vv. 10 & 12). They are excluded from the wedding banquet. Having spent their time nervously scurrying to find more fuel (to achieve the Law's demands), they likewise discover that all they have looked forward to is gone: They have miss the bridegroom, the banquet, and the door is shut. Their hopes are snuffed out; extinguished.

## **PROGNOSIS: The Crisis Diverted**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Revitalizing Energy***

Little do the bridesmaids know that with the arrival of the bridegroom a wondrous help, an incredible rescue—THEIR rescue—is about to happen. It involves the Groom's Father who has been watching and has had mercy on them all, and for reasons unknown, desires their company at the banquet. So he devises an all-inclusive energy plan to transfer renewable energy from up "in heaven" down to "earth" to the sinners that need it. This rescue will open heaven's door to everyone, even and especially those who have been excluded. As expected, it involves the Bridegroom, who at Calvary pushes all would-be bridesmaids (sinners) aside, takes their place in the doorway as it is slammed on them. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" he cries from the cross as he gets excluded in their place (27:46). Even more wondrous, He tells his Dad, the Door-Keeper, "here's my ID, use it for these bridesmaids and let them in." And, we are told, the Door-Keeper gladly complies and in delight, opens the door to the Bridegroom-Son as well.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Renewable Energy***

Wise bridesmaids gladly exchange their meager energy supplies

for what the Groom offers from this new Good Friday-Easter energy source. Their perishable supply gets replaced with an energy that lasts, a renewable energy. Just as literal wind-energy is renewable, this renewable energy is also a wind-energy. We call it the Holy Spirit, and it never runs out; we can rely on it endlessly. This new energy produces two unique affects: First, it gives the user the courage to be honest about her- or himself; dependent on Christ's Spirit, forgiven sinners live a repentant faith, and (2) such faith always points to Jesus (rather than some other messiah).

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Sharing Energy***

Bridesmaids empowered with this renewable energy discover that they have more than enough and can gladly share what they have. Keeping track of resources, or determining who's worthy to receive it, is irrelevant. After all, the Groom has made a promise, "Remember, I am with you always to the end of the age" (28:20). That's more than enough energy to go around. While they await their Groom's final coming, their lives radiate not frantic combustion, but a steady, welcoming glow giving off the sweet fragrance of forgiveness, joy, and peace.