

I love those women who have the magic purses. You know: anything that you might possibly need is in the purse. A nail file, bandaids, peppermints, pepper spray, a pocket dictionary, a spare pair of socks, a compass, gum, Tylenol, a phone charger, etc. As a baseball mom I noticed that there was always one woman in the group of moms who had a purse like this. What impressed me was not only that this magic purse had everything once, but that it stayed replenished. I mean, I even tried to copy it and have a magic purse of my own: I kinda stalked the magic purse folks for a while, made a list, went to the store, bought the stuff and carried it around. But then things disappeared. When things got used, I didn't go out and buy new supplies. I couldn't seem to remember "Oh, yes, I gave Johnny the ace bandage" and pick one up while at Walgreens. So then I realized that the magic purse was really a mindset and that the home of this woman probably exuded preparedness as well.

After getting rid of my shame and guilt over not being a prepared kind of woman, I just have decided to befriend woman like this and be amazed and awed by her ability.

So in today's parable, I obviously would not have been the bridesmaid with the extra oil. I would have been the one who awoke unprepared for the bridal procession and would have missed the bridegroom.

Preparedness, you see, is a trait that aids resilience. Remember that this is a parable that Jesus is using here, a parable to approximate for folks the nature of the Kingdom of God. To try to grasp the nature of the kingdom of God is a difficult thing, because the kingdom has arrived but it is not here yet. It is already a reality but has not come into its' fulfillment. That is why we groan inwardly. Folks would like to take this parable of the end times, this eschatological parable and make it definite and

try to determine out who are the prepared and who are the foolish bridesmaids or virgins....to do that is to miss the point. The point is the preparedness, the point is being watchful. Watchful because although the end times are not here yet, Jesus is appearing all the time and the kingdom is arriving all the time, yet we are to be prepared.

What these magic purse women have is a lifestyle, a set of practices whose end result is always having what they need at their fingertips. They have a rotating list, or a reminder app on their phone, or they keep a mental checklist that they actually remember when they walk into the store. They have practiced this skill of preparedness and now it is habit: engrained into their daily life and routine.

Which is why we are going to study Spiritual Health and Fitness in Advent. While we are yet

again in the season of waiting (Advent begins the first Sunday in December and beckons us to Christmas Season that BEGINS on the 25th and lasts for twelve days)...while we do this long wait for Christmas to come, we are going to practice and study and practice being prepared. We are going to begin the process of building spiritual resilience. We are going to practice absorbing peace, love and joy into our lives. We are going to practice doing justice, acting in kindness, and being humble. We are going to learn how to live lives of blessing and thanksgiving and praise and how to present ourselves to God for forgiveness, healing, and cleansing.

All of this is the oil for our lamps. Spiritual practice is the extra oil. Spiritual practices are what keeps our lamps lit so that whenever the bridegroom appears, we will be ready. Sometimes the coming of the kingdom is with great joy and resolution of problems and

dilemmas being solved. More often than not, though, the bridegroom and the kingdom, our awareness of God and our need for God, seem to arrive in the moments of vulnerability and trouble, when being human has gotten our attention. That is when it is a good idea to already have a practice in place, to already have the oil in reserve, to already have the magic purse packed.

So, I may not be a magic purse mom, but I practice daily, weekly, and seasonally to be an oil in reserve kind of bridesmaid. I have studied and experimented with and adopted certain practices in my spiritual life that feel like oil ready for my lamp. For me, the liturgical life is that practice: the daily devotions, the Sunday Eucharist, the seasons of the church year, the high and holy feasts: these are the drops of oil in my lamp year after year after year. They are not fancy, they are not new. But as I show up to the practice of them, they keep the lamp lit so I

can see the bridegroom when he arrives as often he does.

We do not know when the final day of reckoning will come: we do not know it for the end of the age, we do not know it in our own lives. We know that these end times beckon. This coming of the kingdom is like the bridegroom arriving: it is the anticipated, expected, prepared for, rejoiced over, participatory. We may not be able to describe it, but we know when it arrives. And what do we do while we wait? We make sure that we have oil in our lamps.