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## *Give Me Oil in My Lamp*

**An Evensong meditation by the Rev. Canon Lauren Holder**  
**The Feast of Tabitha (Dorcas) of Joppa, *observed***

I will confess that I don't always love this text from Matthew. I don't particularly like thinking of the kingdom of heaven as a place where the wise are welcome to the party and the foolish are locked out.

But today the church remembers a woman named Tabitha, or Dorcas of Joppa. And thinking about this Gospel in light of this woman helped me see something new in today's familiar text—something I needed to hear and something I want to share.

I like to call Tabitha by her Greek name, Dorcas, because I used to knit alongside a woman named Dorcas in the little knit shop of my little town growing up. She was lovely, and she was always there to help when I dropped a stitch.

The Dorcas who we remember in today's text would have done the same. She was a disciple of Jesus, and she embodied Jesus's example of serving others. She made clothes for the most vulnerable of her community: widows and orphans. She worshipped God and broke bread with other followers of Jesus in her house church in Joppa. And when she fell ill and died, her community of faith and the community she served sent for Peter, hoping he could come quickly to bless her body and console their grief. Peter did come quickly. But instead of simply blessing her dead body, Peter raises Dorcas to new life. He takes her hand, helps her up, and restores her to her community.

Now why would the church choose the parable of the ten bridesmaids to accompany this story of Dorcas, disciple of Jesus and servant of Joppa? Is it because she's especially smart, and smart people get into heaven? No. I think the text is meant to speak to how we serve God, how we serve one another, and how we ensure we are present to God in the midst of our desire to serve others.

You see, I think the wise bridesmaids are wise, not because they are book-smart or street-smart or clever. I don't think they are wise because they stay awake at all costs—no, all 10 bridesmaids fall asleep! But when they wake up, the wise bridesmaids have enough oil for their lamps. They have enough gas in their tank. They are wise because they take care of themselves.

And I realize that it might sound selfish when they deny the foolish bridesmaids any of the extra oil they have brought along. But isn't it wise to know our own limits? How do we serve others without running ourselves into the ground, so that we can continue to walk in love and continue to serve? We know our limits. We know when to say no.

We honor God by honoring the image of God we are created to be, by caring for ourselves. And when we care for ourselves and honor God's presence within us, we are better prepared to care for others while noticing God's presence around us and celebrating God's presence around us.

So keep caring for each other. Keep serving others. Choir, keep serving with your voices. Musicians, keep serving with your imaginations and your instruments. Altar guild, keep serving with your attention to detail. Flower guild, keep serving with your creativity. Acolytes and vergers, keep serving with your thoughtfulness. And all of you, keep serving with your presence in this place. All of you are serving this community and the kingdom of God in meaningful ways. But take care of yourselves and the light of Christ within you so that you can do those things, and so that you can do them in a way that allows you to notice God showing up right here in our midst.

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