Ladies and Gentlemen! Start Your Engines!

Jan Doellinger
Assistant to the President, Schools

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." Matthew 25:13



Memorial Day weekend. The Indianapolis 500. It is one of the most prestigious racing events to take place every year. According to Wikipedia, "The race is the most prestigious event of the IndyCar calendar, and one of the oldest and most important automobile races. It has been avouched to be the largest single-day sporting event in the entire world. The total purse exceeded $13 million in 2011, with over $2.5 million awarded to the winner, making it one of the richest cash prize funds in sports." Round and around they go for 250 laps, the equivalent of 500 miles, on an oval circuit.

Personally, I'm not really into championship car races. When I hear folks talking about the Indy 500 or when I drive by the track on I-80 at Newton, two things come to mind. The first is "go fast turn left, go fast turn left, go fast turn left," over and over again (boring). The second thing that comes to mind are the words spoken by the announcer at the beginning of the race: **'Ladies and Gentlemen! Start your engines!"** And zoom, they're off!

It takes a ton of money, a lot of time and energy to get a car ready for a race of this caliber. Race car teams don't just show up for the qualifying order the weekend before the race. There are technical specifications and rules. All cars must pass a rigorous technical inspection before the car is eligible to practice. Various criteria include minimum weight, approved parts, fuel, and safety equipment. Thirty-three cars start the race and the winner gets bragging rights, a nice cash reward and bottle of milk.

Have you ever run out of gas? One might understand this happening a generation ago when gas gauges were not entirely accurate and all the warning lights were non-existent. Today we have warning messages that our fuel is running low, giving us a warning that perhaps you have an hour's worth of fuel left, and then progressively urgent warnings that you have just so many miles of available fuel left. Running out of fuel today is rather inexcusable considering all the advantages of technology that are available.

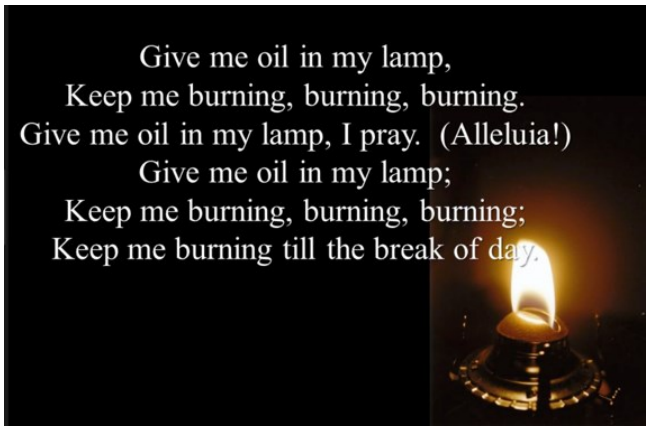
In Jesus' day, when He told the parable of the Ten Virgins, there was a different kind of fuel problem. Consider these words from Matthew 25:1-13:

> *"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. [2] Five of them were foolish and five were wise. [3] The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. [4] The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. [5] The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.[6] "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'[7] "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. [8] The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'[9] "'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'[10] "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.[11] "Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!'[12] "But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.'[13] "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."*

Jesus is making it clear that the end of the world is coming, but we don't know when. We need an overflowing, abundant, and excessive supply of the oil to make it through this waiting period of our Christian journey, until we reach the celebration banquet when Jesus comes back to take us to heaven. This is not the kind of fuel that comes from Casey's or Kwik Trip for $3 a gallon. The wise virgins carry in their hands not only the lamps, but oil with the lamp. That oil is the true faith God had created in their hearts. While these wise virgins wait for the Bridegroom they have something to defend themselves with from Satan, the world, and their sinful flesh, until the Bridegroom comes: "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path,"* (Psalm 199:105)

Ladies and Gentlemen…er, my fellow Lutheran school teachers, administrators, and directors…Start your engines! The 2018-2019 school year is about to begin. What does your fuel gauge read? **If you're out of fuel, you can't be ready.** Your tank needs to be full so you can sustain the long haul. Your faith and trust in Christ will keep your light burning bright in sadness and joy, frustration and exultation, and all that you will encounter this school year as you minister to your students, families, and colleagues.

Luther said: "Therefore, let each one see to it that he has these two together: the oil, which is true faith and trust in Christ; and the lamps, the vessel, which is the outward service toward your neighbor. The whole Christian life consists in these two things: Believe God. Help your neighbor. The whole Gospel teaches this. Parents should tell it to their children at home and everywhere. Children, too, should constantly foster this Word among themselves."[1] My prayer is that your tank is filled, and stays filled, with the knowledge and assurance that your salvation is the work of God. He has made it known through His Word. He has called us to believe in Jesus. It is not any work of ours that saves us, but Jesus, in whom we place our trust. Because of what He has done in you, now go share that with the kiddos in your classroom and school this new school year! "*Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour,"* (Matthew 25:13).



[1]A Sermon on the Gospel for the Twenty-Seventh Sunday after Trinity, October 21, 1522