**Wake Up!**

Narrative Lectionary Lent IV

March 31, 2019

Matthew 25: 1-13 Russell Mitchell-Walker

What is a Palestinian wedding like? In todays’ reading we get a glimpse of some of the cultural practices of a wedding in Jesus’ time. Weddings were usually in the evening, and would start with the fathers and the bridegroom at the bridegroom’s family home, negotiating and confirming the dowry. At the bride’s house the bride would wait for the bridegroom along with a group of young women, the bridesmaids. Once the bridegroom arrived, there would be a procession, with the bridesmaids and the bride and groom. Given this was well into the evening, the procession needed be lit by the oil lamps that the bridesmaids had. Without street lights that we are used to, the oil lamps of the bridesmaids would be important to light the procession, otherwise they would be walking in utter darkness and would have difficulty being able to see where they were going. In this story, the bridegroom was probably delayed because the negotiations took longer. In hearing and thinking about this parable, one might ask, why didn’t the so-called wise young women share the oil they had. Did the so-called foolish bridesmaids consider all the possibilities, such as it could be a very late night? Were they being present to all of what might be expected of them, to light the way? Did they only go by what usually happens rather than considering what could happen? Knowing how important the lamps were, one could understand not wanting to share as they all may run out of oil and then none of them would be able to light the way. The message here is one of being awake, prepared, alert, vigilant, attentive, because we do not know when we will experience Jesus’ coming, the coming of God, or what life will bring.

What does it mean to keep awake, to be vigilant or attentive? I have come to understand this as being present in the moment. When I am present, I am attentive to what is going on around me as well as within me. I often begin my day with the meditation or mantra “May I have a quiet mind, and open heart, and be grounded in my body”. What I neglect or forget to do is draw on that practice that sense of presence throughout my day. It is too easy to get consumed by what I have to get done, and then I find I am just going through the motions and not being attentive. I am not present. While I may think I am being productive, I am missing out on truly experiencing myself and others. I can get stuck in the usual routines of things. I often think that I am doing well, that I am being present, but then something will happen, that wakes me up, a disturbance to my perceived peace. Someone being upset with me, forgetting a task or appointment, or realizing I am more focused on myself or what I want, and not considering those around me. Like the bridesmaids who ran out of oil and were woken up by the bridegroom’s arrival and missed out because they were not attentive to all the possibilities. For example, a few weeks ago, on [Messy Church](https://www.messychurch.org.uk/) day, I was tired from being up late the night before, preparing for the program. I knew what was needed to be prepared, and I finished what I needed to earlier than I expected, so I went home to have a late lunch and try to have a nap before needing to come back later in the afternoon. I was just eating when someone texted me that they were at the church to read the Review. I had forgot that I said I would be at the church most of the day so we scheduled access to the building for reading the review. As a result the member was locked out and upset that they could not get in. If I took a moment before I left, was present and attentive to more than just the usual routine of getting ready for Messy Church, I would have remembered and checked the schedule, making sure I was at the church for the times we promised. You may say, its understandable given all that was going on and being tired, to make such a mistake. However, it is even more important to make the effort to be present and attentive when we are tired.

I also know the importance of taking time throughout the day, to stop, breathe, centre myself before jumping into the next task. Brian keeps reminding me, presence can’t be a habit or a routine, it is a practice that comes with intention. When I am stuck in patterns of routine and getting things done, without presence, I am not fully engaged in what is best for me and for those around me. We breathe into our bodies when we are present or mindful, because our bodies ground us in the moment. Our body cannot be in the past or the future, only in the here and now. Too often, we dwell on the past or worry about the future, as Milton was in the story. When we are grounded in our body, these ruminations and worries are not present. We feel the light and sensation of our aliveness as Milton did. It is easier said than done and takes practice. We need to practice it in a way so that when we need it, we can draw on it easier. Much of my understanding of presence has come through the training and experience through learning about the Enneagram personality typing system at the [Enneagram Institute](https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/) and the [Deep Coaching Institute](https://www.deepcoachinginstitute.com/). Connecting the centres of head, heart and gut, is a goal of presence. The importance of the Enneagram is more than understanding our personality; it builds our capacity to be present. That is the importance of the system. This can be a challenge to do on your own. It can be helpful to have a supportive, safe community to practice with, learn from, and integrate your experiences. Roxanne Howe-Murphy is the founder of my Coaching school and she is also founding the [Deep Living Institute](https://www.deeplivinginstitute.org/) after writing her 2nd book called [Deep Living](https://www.amazon.com/Deep-Living-Transforming-Relationship-Everything/dp/0979384710): Transforming your Relationship to Everything That Matters Through the Enneagram. Brian is a facilitator and organizer for the Deep Living Institute (and will be away next week as he is one of the facilitators for a Deep Living Retreat in Burlingame California). The Deep Living Institute is a community that supports individuals and groups in working with the Deep Living presence principles in their spiritual journeys, using the Enneagram as a vehicle for healing and moving beyond the limitations imposed by patterns of Type and cultural conditioning – very similar to experiencing how we like Milton can get stuck in our head about what has happened in the past and what could happen in future. When we get into our body sensations we can discover the “inside” of the moment. Brian and I have been talking about offering an Enneagram workshop followed by forming a Deep Living Circle. The workshop will provide an understanding of the Enneagram and Presence, and the Deep Living Circle provides an ongoing circle of support to invite more presence within our lives. It is a safe place to go below the surface of life – to dive underneath the ideas, feelings and stories that distance you from yourself. We’d be happy to hear if you are interested.

Being awake, being present includes being attentive to seeing Christ in others and God’s activity in our daily life. I believe that there are opportunities that we are presented with that have a divine connection. I don’t fully understand how God works in our lives or my life, but I have learned the importance of being open to the possibilities and am seeing God at work more and more. Some of you have heard me talk about the Facebook request on Eastside’s page from Glen Elm School for some breakfast food. I could have responded to that with ‘sure, we can put the word out to gather some cereal and juice’. However, I wanted to find out what the need really was, and was open to exploring partnership with the school. It turns out that the principal is Melanie Little who I know from Sunset United Church. We set a meeting for this past Thursday and in thinking about this meeting and being open to what God might be up to in it, I was aware that I have run into Melanie a few times this past year. I had not seen her before that since leaving Sunset. In the meeting, it became clear that the need was more around lunch food. There are at least five students who regularly come to school without lunch, and more that that on average. As we talked about the possibility of making some lunch food that could be frozen so that it is only a once a week volunteer need, she named that she would like it to be more than charity. She’d like to see the children help prepare the food and learn about nutrition. At that point I thought of [Munch](https://www.munchinregina.ca/) who we see as part of our ministry in this building. They are an organization that works with folk with intellectual disabilities to do just that. Another connection, another potential partner. Melanie also told me about a grant application that she didn’t get around to doing whose deadline was just extended. The criteria fit perfectly for this kind of program. I spoke with Munch and they are interested. The clergy of the other churches here are interested as well as the Islamic Circle of North America Sisters, Regina chapter. So come the fall as we explore this, we could have once a week, lunch making with Munch and Glen Elm students and a volunteer or two from one of Living Spirit partners or the ICNA Sisters.

As I reflect on how this has come together, it feels bigger than me. There is something more going on here. God is up to something, God is in this. There are too many coincidences, and connections, what some have heard me call ‘God Incidences’. Being open and attentive to the Spirit, to God in our lives, offers opportunities and blessing.

This one example of what it means to stay awake. To be present and vigilant to seeing where God comes into our lives, or identifying when God is up to something. It is important to practice experiencing the now, as Milton did and trying to get in touch with that sense of aliveness. I invite you to take a moment now, to breathe deeply into your belly, quiet your mind, and open your heart. Feet grounded on the floor, breathing, can you get to a place of feeling that light inside your body and the tingling aliveness within you? Take a moment…….May you continue to practice this presence. We never know the day or the hour when God, when Christ will come, when we will see or experience the Divine breaking through. May we work to be present, to be attentive, and open that we are prepared when God comes.