

air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13

¹“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 for 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.

Special Music

“I Need Thee Every Hour” Lynne Walker and Chris Harris
[Video https://youtu.be/KPtHf9_xuPM]

Sermon

Be Prepared

How has this week been for you, especially after Tuesday’s election? Did you wait for the results on pins and needles? Did you try to set it aside and let the news come when it was ready? Did the news feel to you like good news or bad news?

Today’s gospel reading can feel a bit like waiting for election results; and it definitely has both good news and bad news, depending on whether you were a wise or foolish bridesmaid. But the focus of our parable today is not about the outcome, it is about being prepared; because the outcome is already known – Jesus will return... as we pray every week ‘Thy kingdom come’. It’s not a matter of if, but when.

Being prepared is important anytime, just like the Boy Scout motto. And we realize it is important whenever we buy health insurance, plan for our children’s education and our retirement, and write our wills. And in this section of Matthew’s gospel Jesus is preparing his disciples not just for his coming crucifixion, but beyond it for his Parousia, his return in glory.

Jesus begins his message by saying “the kingdom of God is like...” and then uses the image of a wedding, a powerful theme used throughout the history of Israel [Isa 25:6] (and even within Christian history – Rev 19:7) to refer to the coming of God’s reign. So it is easy to recognize that here, at least in the broad strokes, Jesus is the bridegroom, and his church is the bride. And us, you and I, are the entourage, the attendants of the bride. And his final conclusion, and the end of the story is “Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” That Greek word, keep awake, gregoreo can be translated be ready, be alert, be vigilant, be prepared.

In fact, the only difference between the wise and the foolish bridesmaids was their preparedness. All 10 maidens were invited and honored guests. All 10 were to greet the bride and groom's arrival with a procession of light in the darkness. All 10 were decked out with gorgeous dresses and glowing lamps. All 10 waited for the arrival of the bridegroom together; and when he was delayed they all became drowsy and slept. They all knew the groom was coming and waited with their lamps burning, but only half considered that the wait in the darkness might be longer than anticipated. So when they heard the shout "the bridegroom is here" they all got up together and finished their preparations.

But to their horror, the foolish maids then realized they were missing something important. They did not have enough oil to keep their lamps burning through the festivities. They turned to ask the wise bridesmaids for a refill, but they were refused. The wise maidens realized that if they shared their oil there would not be enough for any wedding procession. Then what? So those who had not prepared well had to go and find an all-night True Value. By the time they drove to the store in Greenfield and back, the door to the wedding feast was shut and locked tight. They begged to be let in, but the bridegroom answered them, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you". Now, it was truly too late for them, simply because they were ill-prepared.

And we don't like that ending, do we? It just feels wrong. Wrong for the wise maidens not to share, wrong for the bridegroom and host not to welcome them. But it is Jesus' story – and his warning – to us. It is foolish to be caught off guard, especially when we know what's coming. We know how important it is to be ready for events in our lives. How many teenage girls start thinking now about their wedding day? We prepare for putting our children through college when they haven't even crawled out of the crib. We are ready to retire the day after we start to work.

And yet we are often more like the foolish bridesmaids than wise women when it comes to our spiritual life. That's why Jesus' story about the 10 bridesmaids hits so close to home. We too, all too often, try to squeak by in our spiritual life. We try to get by on too little. And then because we are unprepared, we get caught short and have to scramble to catch up, or pay the consequences.

And we too hope that we can borrow from others in order to make it through. But as William Barclay has observed: "There are certain things which cannot be borrowed. The foolish maidens found it impossible to borrow oil, when they discovered they needed it. A person cannot borrow a relationship with God; one must possess it. A person cannot borrow a character; one must be clothed with it. We cannot always be living on the spiritual capital which others have amassed. There are certain things we must win or acquire for ourselves, for we cannot borrow them from others."

As much as we may wish it was otherwise, spiritual preparedness cannot be shared. There is just some "oil" in life that we just can't borrow from anyone else. There are some kinds of preparations we just have to do for ourselves. There are some reserves that no one else can build up for us. We can't borrow someone else's peace of mind, or passion for God, or courage

in life. It doesn't work. You have to pursue for yourself whatever it is that fills you up spiritually; whatever will keep you going and carry you throughout the day.

Readiness that will see us through the long haul comes only by cultivating our own relationship with God. We prepare ourselves with those foundations for life by attending to them before we are in desperate need. If you pray and spend time with God every day there will be an open path for you in the midst of a crisis. If you read and come to know and treasure Scripture now its words of counsel and hope will in easy reach for you when you turn to God for guidance. If you regularly participate in the life of the church you will be upheld and supported by a community of faith whenever you need them. It is in those smaller, daily habits that our spiritual preparedness is formed.

Jesus suggests that we prepare ourselves for the unexpected, we prepare ourselves for God's kingdom well before the kingdom, or life in general, takes us by surprise. Its good advice, in fact it is a bit of true wisdom. So, my scouting graduates, and disciples of Christ, are you prepared?

Amen.

Hymn

“Take Time to Be Holy”

Chris Harris

[Video <https://youtu.be/bMIsifnlQN8>]

1. Take time to be holy, speak oft with your Lord;
Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word.
Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.
2. Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like Him you shall be;
Your friends in your conduct His likeness shall see.
3. Take time to be holy, let Him be your Guide;
And run not before Him, whatever betide.
In joy or in sorrow, still follow the Lord,
And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word.
4. Take time to be holy, be calm in your soul,
Each thought and each motive beneath His control.
Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,
You soon shall be fitted for service above.

Joys and Concerns

As you meet with God in prayer, please lift up the joys and concerns shared through the Trumpet Blast. God is eager to be your help and strength, to listen to you and meet your needs. Prayer is a gift we can always use.

Prayers of the People

God of all grace, we thank you and praise you for your constant love and mercy toward us. We thank you for Jesus Christ, who came to lead us into your kingdom, and challenged us to be diligent in our pursuit of you. We thank you for your Spirit, who enlivens us to your call, holds us steady in our hope, and leads us on in the faith. Knowing that our journey is still has a long way to go, we come to you now, O God, seeking your presence and your power.

We pray, for your church and for this congregation. Keep the hope of your coming alive in us, and keep us attentive to our true purpose here on earth. Grant to each of us the strength and commitment to pursue our relationship with you, and for that relationship to become a beacon of grace in the world.

We pray for all who are leaders in this world. Grant them your guiding presence and wisdom that they may faithfully serve your good purposes for all people. And grant to all your people, a reservoir of faith, hope and love that will empower us to share the light of the gospel with all the world. We pray also for all those who long for your kingdom's coming. Grant your strength to the oppressed, your guidance to the perplexed and your hope to the disheartened. Grant also your healing to the ill, your comfort to the sorrowful, and your provision to the needy. We especially thank you for your goodness to ... and we lift up the needs of ... and all those concerns which remain in our hearts.

We praise you, Glorious God, for all your mercy and grace toward us, through Jesus Christ who taught us to pray...

Choral Response [Video - https://youtu.be/IAivVHv_mbc]

The Lord's Prayer

Offering

We are called to live wisely in this time and in this place. We are challenge to be prepared for the coming of God's kingdom. The offerings we give are an act of hope and trust, as we seek to be faithful servants of the good news of Jesus Christ. Let us pray.

We set our hope in you, Faithful God, and seek to honor you through our offerings and our efforts. Help us choose daily to live in genuine relationship to you and to one another. May the hope of your reign shape our lives in ways that will make the promise of your kingdom real in the midst of our world. Amen.

Doxology [Video - <https://youtu.be/5I7PEGUPAXQ>]

Common Commission

Let us go forth into the world in peace, being of good courage, holding fast to that which is good, rendering to no one evil for evil, strengthening the faint-hearted, supporting the weak, helping the afflicted, honoring all persons, loving and serving the Lord, and rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Benediction

Go now into the world

Be strong and of good courage; do not fear; for it is God who goes with you,
and God will never fail you nor forsake you. Deut 31:6, adj

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Postlude

“My Country Tis of Thee”

Lynne Walker

[Video <https://youtu.be/iuBJE3ycbTY>]