

Sermon
Pentecost 23, Year A

Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus said, "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept.

But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But 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.'

And 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. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

Sermon

The central message of Christian hope,

Is that Jesus cameⁱ to draw finite Creation
into relationship with infinite Eternity.

Jesus comes with all his grace!

Comes to save a fallen race! ⁱⁱ

God's Creation is filled with Gods' grace,

and in that grace lays our hope!

Through Jesus, God restores Creation and bends it,
towards God's intentions, purposes and justice.

The beatitudes reveal both the shape of God's Kingdomⁱⁱⁱ and
its sharp contrast to the world's justice and systems. ^{iv}

If God's Kingdom s filled with Gods' grace,

Where's that grace in today's parable?^v

Jesus answers that question^{vi},

But getting to the truth requires a bit of work.

Walking the path with Jesus requires patience.

Understanding what he says isn't always as easy as we'd like.

He seems to rarely get straight to the point.

Jesus liked the roundabout path.

Even if we catch a little bit, it's easy to miss the message.

Let's put the beatitudes into some context. Maybe that will help.

In the days before he preached the beatitudes,

Jesus had gone around Jerusalem,

Criticizing the Pharisees, and pretty much making sure
the stuff was going to hit the fan.

Then, suddenly, Jesus detoured to the parable of

the 10 bridesmaids^{vii} and the big Hebrew wedding.

2000 years ago the Hebrew tradition was that, after the wedding

the bridegroom and his family

would adjourn to the bride's family home.

There, while the marriage was consummated,

A loud and boisterous multi day party would ensue.

The bridesmaid's main job was to welcome

the groom, his family and his friends,

When they eventually arrived.

All that took forever in those days.

Ancient Near Eastern people were not hung-up on time, like we are.

They were not, what we call "punctual". *At All.*

Not a lot of Timex's in that universe. ^{viii}

A bridegroom turned up when he turned up.

Everyone knew it would be dark before everything fell into place,
So the bridesmaids always needed to have oil lamps.^{ix}

Once it got dark, the 10 bridesmaids fired up their lanterns,
And began their nervous vigil.

They waited and they waited. And they waited.

They waited... and they waited... and they waited...

One by one the girls dozed off. *Sweet dreams ladies!!*

Can you imagine all the fuss and confusion,
when the bridegroom finally arrived!

Now is their moment! Now is their time!

But the bridesmaids had waited so long, their lamp oil ran low!

Five of them had extra lamp oil. But five did not.

They ran out ran to their sisters, their friends,
and their family, pleading for lamp oil.^x

But everyone said: “No. We only have enough for us.”

We are going to the party. And you’re not. *See Yah!!^{xi}*

So what’s Jesus’ point? Always have extra oil? ^{xii}

Was this sort of a spiritual Y2K?

Are we supposed to make sure that we

have some extra faith in our spiritual ammo box? ^{xiii}

Jesus' point isn't easy to sort out.
It's not enough to simply repeat the story,
as if the Truth were self-evident.

Elsewhere^{xiv}, Jesus said:

“... if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.^{xv}”

“Give to everyone who begs from you.

Do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.”^{xvi}

God invites us to live with a generous spirit.

In God's Kingdom generosity reigns.

We are called to faithfully share,
not out of our abundance, but out of our scarcity.^{xvii}

We are people who claim Christ.

We are not allowed to party^{xviii},
while others linger in hunger and fear.

We are people who claim Christ.

We are called to care about -- and to care for --
those who are left outside,
excluded from lives of light and warmth and safety.

Jesus promised:

“Ask, and it will be given to you; Search, and you will find;
Knock, and the door will be opened^{xix}....”

And so in His Kingdom, everyone who asks shall receive,
... everyone who searches shall find, and
... for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”^{xx}

Jesus tells us:

Keep awake... for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Keep awake

Jesus’ Kingdom is coming. Don’t be caught by surprise!

Keep awake!

Stay awake – be ready. Stay engaged.

Jesus told Peter and James and John to stay awake,
When he walked away to pray in the Garden,
Knowing that the cross was straight ahead.

But those three slept like babies ^{xxi} while Jesus wept tears of blood.
They didn’t remember today’s parable ^{xxii}
And we must not forget!

We are called to be awake.

We are called to lean into lives of faith and hope,
Especially when the world is going nuts.

We are called to hope and we are called to serve,^{xxiii}
We are called to live with eyes wide open.

We are called to do whatever Kingdom work

God puts in our path. ^{xxiv}

Stay awake!

The bridegroom is here! Come to his banquet.

Celebrate the bridegroom and the life he shares with us!

Stay awake! Stay awake!

-AMEN

ⁱ And will come again.

ⁱⁱ https://hymnary.org/text/jesus_comes_with_all_his_grace, Wesley, Charles

ⁱⁱⁱ Already here, but not yet fully realized

^{iv} See, in Google Scholar,

https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/1779204/Eucharistic_Shape_of_Evangelism.pdf?response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DProclaiming_and_Demonstrating_the_Kingdo.pdf&Expires=1604440053&Signature=MSyOOm1othTRAG9g2JbEwV8TsJ9RDC80l~Z5LNj8MWNqpbAAXVNfg2Wr9beaZkp91lw91wklcPHPAPI5xu9xE7LIh1D2hLePLn4OSWcSucZc6k~t~UVv8txjKADV-VEs1pDIcMr3iYyzRPfOAJ5LdtHV9piNfxxJVpg6GdxQjQo7HFMtxX4ukj2J4Knr6sh4RFCDMleDrUvtWMkK3yaZ9ZSLTxhXQisetwIX5HFRGKVG9o7d7u8vqjSCRRTsb-N3BpP5KpCaXnbHL7m1h2tkuoD8NGIX7Wqwr95pQc6lVBydh0qvlhbTMC~yysLfyurij-wjO3KSYql5pv8NP6v~FA&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA

^v If God's Kingdom is filled with God's grace, where is that grace in today's parable? Is it already here, in some way, but not yet fully developed?

^{vi} The structure of the beatitudes, as we read them, is largely a construct of modern language, since ancient Greek had little or no punctuation or capitalization. Thus, the form of the

beatitudes as we have them represents an informed opinion as to what Jesus intended to emphasize, or as to what the authors of the scriptures *thought* that he intended.

Were there 8 beatitudes or were there 10? Matthew (25:3- 12, 5:11–12)) seems to suggest a total of 9, each one focusing on persons who were deemed, in ANE culture, as unfortunates, but who Jesus pronounced as blessed. Some theologians suggest that Mathew’s so-called “9th” beatitude is based on Isaiah 51:7 (““Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have taken my instruction to heart: Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals or be terrified by their insults.” (NIV)

Notably, Luke 6:20–22 records but four Beatitudes, and his final word (Luke 6:23) may parallel Matthew 5:11–12. Luke Gospel offers 4 beatitudes, followed by four “woes” (see, Luke 6:24–26). See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beatitudes#Biblical_basise, for a good summary and reference to many sources.

vii ...who were waiting to meet the bridegroom.

viii No cell phones to buzz or ring or drive you nuts. How lucky they were!

ix Wedding traditions were, if anything more important back then, than they are now. For Jesus parable, the traditions were critical.

x They didn’t want to miss the party!

xi So the girls without oil ran out to the HEB to get what they could. But, by the time they got back, they were locked out. They’d missed their chance!

“And 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. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ [and Jesus added] “Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. “ Matt. 25:9-13.

xii Is there some sort of role model in this parable? *Who would that be?* The clueless bridesmaids who didn’t plan ahead? The mean people who wouldn’t share their oil? I don’t think so!

xiii Who knows?

xiv “If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat give your cloak as well...”

xv The late Walter Wink, a scholar and theologian, suggested that Jesus sought to subvert the malign power structures of his time, as he would intend that we do, today ... when such powers seek to harm God’s creation, including people.

For example, Wink theorized that, in the Ancient Near East (ANE) a person of status might strike a person with the back of his or her hand (especially when the person being struck was of a lower socioeconomic class) as an assertion of status power, dominance and authority. However,

when the persecuted person "turned the other cheek," he or she turned the tables, since to strike that cheek would require either the use of the left hand, a socially barred action for anyone, or slapping the other cheek with an open hand, would be to recognize the putative victim as a person of equal social status.

As such, by turning the other cheek, the persecuted person passively, but effectively, asserted equality. This is, as such, distinct from the so-called "Christian Pacifism". See, Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination, pp. 175–82. Wink, Walter (1992), Fortress Press, [ISBN 978-0-80062646-4](https://www.fortresspress.com/ISBN-978-0-80062646-4) and cf, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_pacifism

^{xvi} Matthew 5:40-41

^{xvii} Even though the folks who hoarded their lamp oil were worldly wise, they weren't our model of faithful living.

^{xviii} With or without an air of smug self-satisfaction.

^{xix} NB: When the bridesmaids finally made it back with their oil, they knocked on the door and cried: 'Lord, lord, open the door to us.' But he replied, '... I do not know you.'

^{xx} See, Matthew 7:7 *et seq.*

^{xxi} Three times Jesus awakens the disciples, but they were not ready. The third time he tells them that his betrayer is at hand. See, Matthew 26:36-56).

^{xxii} Even the most vigilant of us will doze off, while Jesus' Kingdom tarries!

^{xxiii} Whoever we are

^{xxiv} No matter who sits in *our* White House!