

**“Hope & Help for the Foolish Wedding Party Person”**  
+ Twenty Second Sunday After Pentecost, Year B +  
Amos 5: 18-24; 1Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13  
November 9, 2014

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for this day.

November is a hard month to preach. We’re in the part of the church calendar drawing to a close with Christ the King Sunday and all the readings are telling us to prepare for Christ’s Second Advent (the end of the world) even as we are bombarded with Black Friday & Christmas ads before we’ve even begun to think of the First Advent arrival of Jesus at Christmas. Add to that the fact we’re in Matthew’s Gospel this year and things are very, very dark! Matthew offers more warnings about hellfire and gnashing teeth than the rest of the evangelists combined. So this Sunday we hear a lovely parable that seems to offer little **“Help & Hope for the Foolish Wedding Party Person.”** No, gentlemen I am not going to let you off the hook and preach only about bridesmaids - this is an all-inclusive parable that exhorts all who wait to make the most of our gifts and do good – or else!

This particular parable is, perhaps the most challenging because we don’t celebrate weddings the way they did in ancient Israel with the bridesmaids waiting to usher in the groom and his buddies and family. In our society there are bachelor and bachelorette parties in Vegas and Save the Date – the EXACT DATE announcements months ahead. That was not the case in this parable which makes it rather confusing.

Matthew’s telling of Jesus’ parable was written at the time when the early Christians who have been through great hardship and persecution to confess Jesus as Lord and were anxious for His return. They were all convinced His return would be in their lifetime and were tired of waiting. Paul, writing to the Thessalonians two decades or more after the crucifixion adds another angle on things – they are arguing about who will get to be with Jesus first: those who are alive when He returns or those who are already dead and awaiting the resurrection of all flesh. Paul assures them that at all times they will be with Jesus – “neither life, nor death, nor anything in all of creation can separate us from the love of God shown to us in Christ Jesus” is what he wrote to the Romans. He encourages them so that they will not “grieve as those who have no hope” but will, rather, be able to “give witness to the hope that lies within them.”

That, strangely, is what those wise wedding party members are doing by carrying the extra flasks of oil with them. They kept their hope in reserve – were smart about waiting, I guess you’d say. Sharing what they had wasn’t an option or all the lamps would have gone out and no one would have been able to lead in the bridegroom when, at last, after a delay, He arrived. This isn’t at all like getting the bridesmaid’s dress and not getting it altered in time or forgetting to get measured for your tux – this is really about how you wait – how you occupy yourselves – what occupies your time while you wait.

When I had a sleep study done and they told me I have insomnia they recommended I see a sleep therapist. The therapist said, “Bob, it takes you an hour and a half to fall asleep. What do you do with all that time?” I told him I think about how I want the yard to look, what I’ll plant etc. or mentally write in the novel I haven’t really put down on paper or think about sermon texts etc. He said, “This doesn’t seem to bother you. Most people would be up pacing or watching TV but if you’re just lying there quietly using your imagination and it doesn’t bother you I have no recommendation.” For this I paid a \$25 co-pay.

My ability to live in my imagination is, of course, the reason a “Time Out” chair never worked to discipline me – I could just drift into daydreams but do not misinterpret what I’ve said and apply it to this Gospel text: **DAYDREAMING IS NOT HOW WE ARE SUPPOSED TO WAIT!** No, on the contrary, we wait with purpose – we are to “be at the ready” and about the business God has given us to do while we wait not falling asleep on the job. We are to be a “city on the hill” – a light to illumine others – to draw them to the love of God in Christ Jesus as we see and meet their needs, walk with those fellow Christians who are struggling as they wait for Christ’s return or answers to their heartfelt prayers as well as involving ourselves in the lives of others who do not have the hope of life eternal so that they might come to know Jesus as Lord and be saved.

Active waiting sounds odd – but that is what we are called to be about – not just repeating the same things over and over again in a church service without being connected to them like a worn out recitation. Amos, in a diatribe all who have ever tried to design and lead worship tremble to hear gives us this message from God,

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Take away from me the noise of your songs; will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

That is a call to make worship more than just showing up on time, singing the songs, suffering through the sermon, putting your offering envelope in the plate, taking communion and going home. This is a call to be actively engaged in worship when you're in God's house – finding meaning in the lessons, the hymns – all the parts of the service where God can speak to you as well as being out among the people of the world proclaiming the love of God in Word and Deed – making a difference among the oppressed, seeking justice for those who are unfairly burdened. Caring for the widows and fatherless. Sharing from the wealth of riches that are ours as children and heirs of heaven. Don't just lay around and wait for Jesus to return – make a difference now! Come to worship ready to participate and be fed in Word and Sacrament and go out blessed by God to do God's will in the world.

Well, there's an upbeat description of how to wait – but waiting is oh-so-difficult. Just reading in the text that the reason they were unprepared was because the bridegroom delayed is enough to cause anger – it wasn't their fault – it was the bridegroom's fault – he delayed! But wait a minute – this bridegroom is Jesus.

Why would Jesus delay? Why didn't Jesus return in the lifetime of those saints who were so eagerly awaiting His arrival? Why can't He come right now and put an end to all the painful things you or I might be facing?

I cannot claim to know the mind of God. I certainly would never give a definite time or date for the Second Arrival of Jesus – very presumptuous. I do believe we have been given all we need to know about God in Christ Jesus – all of God's heart has been revealed to us in the giving of God's only-begotten whose sinless life and innocent death paid the price for our salvation and whose resurrection from the dead gives us the assurance that as He rose from the dead, so we, too, shall rise. In God Incarnate we see that our God delays so that more may come to know Jesus – more may be ready for eternity in the presence of God as children and heirs through faith in our Savior and Lord.

Until then – well, we have our work to carry out. We have the Word and Sacraments and the Fellowship of Believers to prepare and encourage us in this work we share. May none of us be found dreaming, day-dreaming or unprepared for the arrival of Christ our King. AMEN

Now may our God of Justice and mercy lead us by His light to see and meet the needs of others as our needs have been met through the gift of God's Son, our brother and Savior. AMEN