



“Be Prepared for Delays”

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Scripture (ERV):

Matthew 25:1-13

25 “At that time God’s kingdom will be like ten girls who went to wait for the bridegroom. They took their lamps with them. **2** Five of the girls were foolish, and five were wise. **3** The foolish girls took their lamps with them, but they did not take extra oil for the lamps. **4** The wise girls took their lamps and more oil in jars. **5** When the bridegroom was very late, the girls could not keep their eyes open, and they all fell asleep.

6 “At midnight someone announced, ‘The bridegroom is coming! Come and meet him!’

7 “Then all the girls woke up. They made their lamps ready. **8** But the foolish girls said to the wise girls, ‘Give us some of your oil. The oil in our lamps is all gone.’

9 “The wise girls answered, ‘No! The oil we have might not be enough for all of us. But go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

10 “So the foolish girls went to buy oil. While they were gone, the bridegroom came. The girls who were ready went in with the bridegroom to the wedding feast. Then the door was closed and locked.

11 “Later, the other girls came. They said, ‘Sir, sir! Open the door to let us in.’

12 “But the bridegroom answered, ‘Certainly not! I don’t even know you.’

13 “So always be ready. You don’t know the day or the time when the Son of Man will come.

Sermon:

How many of you feel uncomfortable with this kind of a parable? The young girls seem mean and act coldly superior. The bridegroom seems like a jerk, locking those other girls out just because they were late.

I once heard a sermon by a nun who was so appalled at this callous treatment that she rewrote the parable so that the girls shared with each other, and the bridegroom reopened the doors for the late girls and everybody went in and had a good time together. Isn't that just great? Isn't that what the Kingdom of God is supposed to be like?

Well, yes.

But...

There are times, like the time of the prophet Amos that we heard about this morning, when it seems that every gentle reminder, or even, every firm warning about responsibility; tests the limits of one's patience because it has to be reiterated so many times.

If you are a parent, if you are a teacher, if you are a supervisor or community leader...in any circumstance where you are the adult in charge...then you know that children, and adults, do not always live into their best impulses, the lessons that have been taught. And that, when they do not live into their best selves, then firm discipline is required to curtail the bad behavior and reinforce appropriate behavior. So, it may be a time-out if you are little, or saying sorry to another child that was mistreated, or "living with the natural consequences" of a bad behavior, whether that is discipline at school, or at work. A bad peer review, or a bad grade. It isn't cruel to control bad behavior. Patience with learning proper actions and behaviors is expected, but repeated bad behavior means that patience wears thin.

In this case, the people of Israel were testing the patience of Yahweh! And as you heard, the tone of the message from Amos became very stern, even angry, at the selfishness and cruelty of the people, and the absence of the great virtues that Yahweh expected from the people, "justice rolling down like waters, righteousness like an ever flowing stream."

The prophet warns them then that the consequences of their behaviors will not be to their liking...that the "day of the LORD" will not be one of happy reunion, but one of discipline, and punishment.

As a Mom I've always been a softie...but my kids knew that I would not tolerate rudeness, bullying, not doing homework, teasing, prejudice, or cruelty to animals or people.

Neither does Yahweh.

And so, what many wish for...the living presence of Yahweh, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us and all the world...this doesn't always happen as expected.

Not if you have been unwilling to prepare your life, your actions, your behavior.

Like those ten girls in the Matthew text...some who prepared, some who did not. All began their day expecting the same experience of the wedding party.

But it didn't happen as expected.

Instead, that big wedding celebration became more like the signs as you head over Snoqualmie Pass in winter, signs that say, "be prepared for delays"...and for many drivers that means turning off to find a motel in Ellensburg, or at least put on chains and gas up the vehicle and buy some granola bars in town, to prepare for the winter weather ahead.

Delays, delays, delays.

When Paul wrote to the house church in Thessalonika he told them not to be saddened by the death of their Christian companions, that there would be a time of reunion and coming together again, when Christ returned. They all hoped it would be soon. But it wasn't.

It didn't happen as expected for the wedding party in the gospel story, or for Paul and those early Christians, either.

But he admonished them to remember, that until Christ returned, they should live willingly with the awareness of delays, but also with awareness of opportunity to practice love and faith and mercy. Wait with a sturdy hope, not knowing when, but nonetheless trusting.

"The day of the LORD will come like a thief in the night."

The bridegroom will come, just not when you thought.

So, live a life that would be recognizable to Jesus.

Most concretely for me, this means I am called to live a life of love and care, now.

Live a life based on Jesus' teaching and values, and do it now.

Live a life of care for others, and care for creation because these are the gifts of God for us and we should neither harm nor take them for granted.

Do it, now.

Because then, when the LORD does come...whether it is into our individual hearts, or with apocalyptic finality to change this world forever...you will be recognizable to Christ.

The Christ, who is transformed and is transforming all things into beauty and completeness, will recognize you as a “wise girl” prepared for the great party; as a person who has heard the call of the prophet to let justice roll down over the world and all its inhabitants, like a river that covers the earth with life, like the mighty Nile covers Egypt with life giving water; and let righteousness flow not for some, but for all; not sometimes but always, like an everflowing stream, a mighty Mississippi, that never runs dry.

And whether it is as a waiting member of the great party, or like the early Thessalonians; we will wait and prepare and be encouraged:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. 15 For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. 16 For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.