

Matt 25:1-13

So now this is Jesus giving a private teaching to his disciples knowing His end was near...giving them further examples about what the Kingdom of God looks like (BTW Matthew is the only gospel by the way who refers to this reality as the kingdom of Heaven)...think of it in the same way!

Delay can be difficult! Especially when we wait for something in anticipation or in high emotions or anxiety. Think about waiting for election results or going on vacation...Are we there yet? Are we there yet?!

If patience is required... here in the US we are in deep doo doo... we are an "I need it now... Amazon Prime society" We love instant gratification! I want it now...I need it NOW!

And patience certainly is not at all one of my strong suits either...I have very little of that gift!

So here Jesus weighs in...and few human events weigh as emotionally exhausting as planning for a traditional wedding.

Parents invest a lot of time, energy, and money for their beloved child. And because they are so emotional... weddings themselves can become fragile with lots of potential for mishaps or disaster. The main characters...the bride, the groom and their parents are all stretched thin and deep feelings can easily surface.

There are tears of joy and profound hope... but there can also arise anger, resentment, and frustration. In the midst of all this, things can go wrong... and often do.

Now this may seem in direct conflict with last week's message...trust God...Oh... but now don't forget to plan or you'll miss the boat. Again you have to read the gospel stories as a whole and be careful when plucking things out. And always note who Jesus is speaking to. Context!

Now last week's lectionary was the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount...It was at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry introducing the kingdom of God to perspective students in the area...And as they prepare and decide to follow this new Rabbi Jesus...He is instructing them in the proper posture for receiving and being conduits of God's grace and Love in the world...by the way...he didn't have many takers did he?! Thousands turned into 12 or so...not exactly a good model for church growth is it?

This parable today is much, much, later... right before his death...it's at the end... and now he is preparing those few who DID chose to follow Him in a posture of patience and readiness in the inevitable turmoil which will surround them following his crucifixion and death...days away only they didn't know that.

Remember these guys kept getting things wrong...at first think think Jesus is the Messiah...as in King David of old...come to conquer and take control...this was about how they thought about Power...and the second coming... the community of Matthew...and many folks today are still waiting for God to come and conquer...again using Power and even violence to reward the faithful while damning everyone else...but if you haven't figured it out yet... that's not Jesus's MO is it?! You can't have it both ways here! Power or Love...Control or Choice

In this teaching... near the end of Jesus' life... He chose this very emotionally charged human event to convey a parable about what the Kingdom of Heaven is like in the wake of His death.

Now in Jesus' day weddings were every bit as emotional as today... if not more so... and their weddings would be scripted and ritualized and would last over several days not just several hours...Their weddings joined whole families and communities together not just the two people getting married like it does today.

So in this instance the groom doesn't arrive on time...and folks fall asleep while waiting...when the announcement finally comes...folks leap into action...but some miss the boat not being prepared...

And for the early Christians... during the time of the writing of this Gospel...Jerusalem had already fallen to the Romans...and many who professed to Follow the way of Jesus after the destruction of the temple were severely persecuted... folks were getting very anxious and tired of waiting for things to turn around...they were promised that if they remained faithful everything would change for them...well that just didn't happen.

Jesus hadn't returned to them as they expected He would...and they found themselves in dire straits for speaking out against the power and authority of the Empire. Some things never change!

See at the heart of our faith lies this idea that everything is headed somewhere...that there's a trajectory...a point to it all...but that would be in God's time which could be many of our lifetimes...

And sometimes we focus so much on some future time...that we often forget and can take for granted the time and the blessings we have been given right now...not just to wait for Christ... but to indeed become Christ for others while we all wait for the end of time.

What does it mean to be prepared and to wait...it certainly wasn't about their attitudes...they could of all been complaining or impatient...the only difference between the wise and the foolish is preparedness!

The wise ones had some extra oil and the foolish ones were looking for the 24 hour convenience store to get some extra oil for themselves...and why didn't the others just share it with them?

Interesting... I wonder what Jesus was getting at here?! Perhaps what the oil represented wasn't something that could actually be shared...more about that in a moment...

So there is not only the waiting... but there is the preparing.

And this is not so much about the 2nd coming and the end of the world as it is about Jesus preparing His own disciples to continue to shine God's light into the world (the lamps and oil reference) especially when all seems hopeless and darkest.

Or especially when it seems that Jesus isn't going to show up here for a face to face visit...see for them Jesus was physical and real...not an idea or a theology... they expected Him in the flesh to return immediately or at the very least within their lifetimes!

Jesus in the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (right after the beatitudes) instructed all who would listen... to go out and let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven...see it's all connected...can you shine your light when things don't go as planned...when you are anxious or afraid...or when you have no control over events and how others act?

How well have you prepared yourselves to shine Christ's light and reveal the Kingdom of Heaven...even while things around you all seem to be going to Hell?

Sound relevant enough for ya?

Don't keep waiting for God to make a move...God already has...Don't wait for Jesus to show up...He already has...the real question is are YOU ready to show up? Again Jesus gives us the choice!

...and that oil which lights the lamp (that you may not be able to go out and buy or to share) are all the gifts of the Spirit that you and I have been given... and hopefully we have built up reserves over our lifetimes to fuel the lamps (the Divine spark) you were given at birth...love, compassion, empathy, faith and hope...If you haven't cultivated them then you just can't go out and borrow some when you need it most.

These are the gifts you were given...and by the way this leads directly into next week's sermon on the parable of the Talents which follows...

So build up your stores of oil so that you may shine forth when the call comes...and by all means don't wait until the end of times...that's already here too!

I promise you... each one of you will have an "end of the world" event in your lifetimes...you will all die from something, be it plague, catastrophe, and accident... or just plain old age.

The end of times... is always the end of your time here...and then what will be revealed to you...by the way do you know what the Greek word for revelation (or to reveal something is) – apocalypse!

How have you prepared your hearts for that revelation? How have you followed the path laid before you? How have you wisely used your gifts... and how have you shone the light of Christ in all the dark recesses of the world?

The bridegroom hasn't forgotten us...and Jesus comes to us in many strange and unexpected ways. Is your lamp trimmed? Are you prepared to receive God when God shows up? See Heaven breaks into Earth when we show up prepared and ready to go...especially when people may be asleep...and especially when things seem darkest.

We also presume that it must also be a physical "end of times" like death! But what about all the darkness and end of times that are happening all around us every day.

The end of a relationship or a circumstance, Moving away, losing a job or changing careers...trapped in your house during COVID!

Life is a series of endings...the end of times!

There's always something that is ending for us...isn't there?!

Are you ready to show up and shine your light into those endings... and by the way aren't endings just part of the cycle...those endings are also another name for new beginnings...

Just like a wedding...What's a wedding?

It's a ritual where two people figuratively and literally die to themselves... only then to be transformed into a new creation... something new altogether...two endings leading to transformation and the new beginnings of a new family!

...and by the way the reason so many marriages here in the U.S. fail is because people refuse to die to their own egos...they are not really open to something new...

Instead it's all about me, me, me...self graftification...not us...together...and those marriages that did not start in the death of self will never grow into anything bearing healthy fruits.

Death is really always just a transition to a new beginning...the death of a way of life... before and after a wedding... for all involved!?

Don't wait to tell someone you love them...don't fight the endings...don't wait to trim your wicks and shine the lights you have been given.

Shine them forth so that you can reveal to the world that the bridegroom has indeed arrived and that you can experience Heaven right here and right now!

Now is the time for active discipleship during all our ending of times... Jesus invites us into a new way of life...a new way of being...and it is always the right time to shine your light...God has shown up...Now will you!?

Your faithful servant,

carmen