

Rev. Chris Christy

Sermon

23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 27 Year A

Wisdom 6:12-16

Wisdom 6:17-20

Thessalonians 4:13-18

Mathew 25:1-13

The Wedding Party

Are you feeling like all you do lately is wait? Over the past 8 months, of this pandemic, “waiting” has become a way of life. Standing in lines 6 ft apart from others waiting our turn, waiting to congregate with others both here at church and at home, waiting for a much-needed hug, waiting for life to return to normal. At times I feel like my patience level is decreasing while I wait. But what are you doing while you wait? As humans some of us tend to procrastinate no matter how much time we have. There are some things that are just easier to “wait” on doing because of the preparation needed to get the job done. We justify waiting because of the anticipated pain the task may cause, or how strenuous the job maybe.

One big problem is often we tell ourselves “while we wait” that we have plenty of time, so we put off preparing and deadlines sneak up on us. Some of us are known procrastinators. When it comes to Christmas shopping, that may be OK. But there are other important things in our life that procrastination could change us forever. I recently read a news clip that relates to this very problem and how deadly this delay can be.

In April, 1988 the evening news reported on a photographer who was also a skydiver. He had jumped from a plane along with several other skydivers and filmed the group as they individually dove out of the plane and opened their parachutes. As the video was being shown of each member of the crew jumping out and then pulling their rip cord so that their parachute opened to the wind, the final skydiver opened his chute and then the picture went berserk. The announcer reported that the cameraman had fallen to his death, having jumped out of the plane without a parachute. It was not until he reached for the ripcord that he realized he was free falling without a parachute. Up until then, he was enjoying himself and was absorbed in what he was doing. But tragically, he was unprepared for the jump. It did not matter how many times he had done it before or what skill he had. By forgetting the parachute, he made a foolish and deadly mistake. Nothing could save him, because his faith was in a parachute which he had never taken the trouble to buckle on.

It is impossible to study the New Testament without finding some rather startling things that Jesus said about His return. Often, He spoke in parables and used stories that can shake up our theological minds. Our gospel reading today, Jesus used the parable of

the 10 virgins to warn us about the danger of procrastination. Just like the news report of the skydiver, this parable shows us how crucial preparing can be. The return of Jesus is not something we can push to the back of our minds thinking it'll never happen! So let us look into the meanings of this parable and figure out what Jesus was telling us.

The Virgins:

Ten young Jewish girls are waiting for the bridegroom. They are 1st century Jewish bridesmaids (or bridal attendants) but their job right now is waiting, not for the bride, but for the bridegroom. When he arrived, they would walk with him, carrying flaming torches as the bridegroom took his bride home.

The ten virgins represent purity; like the purity in us, whose sins have been forgiven by the death of Jesus on the cross.

Half of them had more than enough oil to last no matter how long the bridegroom was delayed in coming.

The other half only had enough reserve to last a short while. It is a little like the story of the seed that fell on the rocky ground. They received the news with great joy, but this half of the church were not able to stay prepared and ready to stick it out for the long haul.

The Torches or Lamps:

Now the torches or lamps normally signify the human spirit of a person. I quote one example from Proverbs 20:27 which says, "The spirit of a man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the inner depths of his heart." The lamps, or the light from the lamps, is therefore a reference to our human spirit, our personal thoughts, and motivations; basically ourselves, without God.

The Oil:

The oil in the lamp is the stuff, or thing, that makes lamps shine light and keep shining light. Now the oil in the bible is always a reference to the Holy Spirit.

There have been a lot of different interpretations as to what is meant by the oil. Some had supposed that the difference was faith. It is true that if your faith is real, you will stick it out to the end. If not, you will fall away. Some have interpreted it as the good works that show what is in the lamp.

Most Christians agree that the dove, the wind, and oil are some of the symbols of the Holy Spirit and throughout the Old and New Testament we see oil being used for holy purposes: such as pouring oil on heads for anointing (which is empowering) and consecration (which is to make clean); basically the physical symbolic application of the Holy Spirit.

This reveals to us that the Holy Spirit must be involved in every area of the believer's life. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit, in our lives and in our churches, spiritual darkness would soon overtake. Can you see where I am going with this?

To others the oil represents the inner spiritual life of the believer. The Holy Spirit's presence and control over the believer's life. The wise virgins had the spiritual reserve to stay ready. They did not fall away, even though they may have fallen asleep for a while.

The Bride:

The special relationship Jesus has with his church is seen in the terminology the Bible uses to refer to the church. The church is called the "Bride of Christ" and "Christ is the Bridegroom". "We" are the church (the Bride). Love has built a bridge between us and God so that we might have a special relationship with Him. The church is very special to our Lord. He died to bring her into existence. His love for the church is what gives us hope.

The Groom:

Next, we have the groom arriving to bring his bride (the Church) back to his home. The groom on this occasion represents "Jesus" who has come to take "us" back to his home in heaven (the Kingdom of God).

Time:

Midnight is symbolic of the fact that there will be a time when it will be too late to put our life in order.... When Jesus splits the Eastern Sky, the trumpet of Heaven will sound, and time, as we know it, will be no more.... We need not procrastinate.

When the call came out – the bridegroom is near! All 10 Virgins lit their lamps to greet him, but 5 lamps quickly burned out. Notice what those 5 Virgins tried to do. You worked hard. You are better prepared. Share some of your oil with me. To which the 5 wisely said: We can't! You can't get in on our oil. You must have oil of your own! The point is that 5 Virgins were spiritually strong. The other 5 did not have the spiritual reserves to endure to the end.

Being prepared can neither be transferred or shared. This is something every single person must do as an act of their will. Your parent's relationship is not inherited, your husband's or wife's faithfulness will not apply to you. You will be judged based on what you have decided in your own heart and how you lived that out. You cannot ride on anyone else's coattails.

The Door to the Kingdom of Heaven:

There will come a time when the door will shut!

Because the foolish maidens were not prepared, and because they had to leave to get the oil needed, they missed the noticeably short window of opportunity. By the time they had returned, with or without oil, we do not know; the door had been shut. And once it is shut, the bridegroom will not open it again.

I think what Jesus was trying to communicate in this parable, is for us to make certain of our own faith, our own spiritual vitality. And to watch that we do not come up short! And the reason for that is my point Jesus used this parable to tell us what to expect when he returns.

Our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is critical!

Living life in relationship with Jesus is critical!

Loving God and loving our neighbor is critical; there is no other commandment greater than these!

Are you ready? Are you prepared?

The parable of the ten virgins asks us to consider which 'group of five' best describes us.

Which set of bridesmaids describes you?

Conclusion:

Peter challenges us to "Make our calling and election sure!" We are to be prepared, always alert, ready! Are you ready? We don't know the day or the hour of Christ's return. We don't know what tomorrow will bring. If you had to see Jesus face to face today, would you be ready? Is there oil in your lamp? Or has the wick died out?

As this parable tells us, there will be an ending. There will be a day when the groom is going to come strolling into town and the big party is going to be held. But it will also be a day when the way we've lived out our faith is accounted for.

The real question then is what resources are you stocking up for your everlasting spiritual journey? Do you have enough spiritual oil to last between Jesus' first coming and his ultimate return? Are you using what you have been given, are you making the smart choices, are you seeking first the kingdom of God during this in-between time?

Live every day for Him, being fruitful through the power of the Holy Spirit as we wait on His return..... He has given us a mission to carry out until He comes again.... We are to be about our Father's business..... Sharing the Good News.... Being Light in the Darkness....

Amen

