Amos 5:18-24
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25:1-13

Now as we are coming to the end of our very long season of the Sundays after Pentecost our focus shifts from how to be good disciples, symbolized by the color of growth, green to the more Advent-like theme of waiting.

Today's gospel parable, as well as the next two we will hear, points to this waiting – the coming again of Christ we proclaim each time we celebrate the eucharist. Matthew writes his story of Jesus' ministry knowing of his resurrection and ascension into heaven with the promise "to be with you always, even to the end of the age." So, even though we are in the chapter leading up to Jesus' death, this new life would be very much front of mind.

There are even some churches which extend backwards the season of Advent, beginning with this Sunday, so there are seven, mimicking in some ways the season of Lent, but mostly because the themes of these seven weeks are very similar.

These Sundays invite us to learn new vocabulary: eschatology and Parousia. Eschatology is the study of the end times. Not necessarily those described in the Revelation to John, those have a very specific and worldly context of their own. But rather the end of time as we know it in this life and the transition to God's time and life in the kingdom of God – the perfection of God's creation in which we were all meant to live before human sin came into the world. And Parousia, the second coming of Christ, in glory, to both judge and redeem the whole world.

It is for both of these things we wait. Not idly, twiddling our thumbs, but actively and in accordance with the teachings of Christ.

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians addresses their waiting. Decades after the resurrection and ascension and whole generation awaits Christ's coming again in anticipation of his raising all the dead to new life. They are afraid, not for themselves, but for the generations who "are sleeping," who went before and did not know Christ. Paul assures the Thessalonians that the dead, far from being forgotten, not lost for time and eternity, will be given priority. They, like we, worry about what life after death will look like.

In our Old Testament reading, the prophet Amos begins with a question: "Why do you want the day of the LORD?" And we probably wonder what exactly is "the day of the LORD" in their context. It is meant to be a day of deliverance, from their enemies, as has happened so often in their past. Yet, it does not sound so hopeful on Amos' lips. They wait for God's deliverance but fail to act justly and righteously in the meantime. It seems their kind of waiting is not what God desires.

Ten bridesmaids, five foolish and five wise, never-the-less all are waiting expectantly for the bridegroom, understood to be the Christ who will come again. It is a common misreading of this passage that the five foolish are Jewish who have not accepted Jesus as messiah while the five wise have. They are all waiting. They are just waiting differently and there-in lies the heart of the parables lesson. It is a cautionary tale; one which the sweep of these seven weeks reminds us to take seriously.

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How do we wait? We gather and we pray. So did the Israelites, though, yet we hear through Amos that God has rejected their burnt offerings, their hollow prayers because they are not coupled with right action of justice and righteousness, ethical and Godly living within their own communities.

We pray for the poor – but do we feed them? We pray for the sick, the dying, those in prison, but do we act in some way to offer tangible comfort.

We pray for justice – but do we act justly?

The psalmist cries out to God, “my helper and my deliverer,” but are we the hands and feet, the voice and heart of Christ serving the body of Christ?