



Well, November proved to be a little lean month as only 7 gents showed for our monthly LCOC Men's Prayer Breakfast on Saturday 11 Nov 2017. But that's OK, those that did show were treated to some marvelous breakfast wraps consisting of cheese, eggs, sausage and potatoes with a nice hint of salsa. Add in some fresh fruit and coffee and we have yet again a feast for the eyes and our bellies. Some even enjoyed seconds (and thirds!). There is lots of culinary skills amongst the gents, but always room for some good ole donuts and bagels as well. The gents (and honorary members) never fail.

OK, so with the small crowd, what was some of the small talk overheard? First up, technology. Especially when it comes to computers. Many of us recall the early days of computers when you had this keyboard, a big floppy disk, and that little green square on the computer screen blinking at you saying "Well, are you going to do something?" And on too many occasions whatever you typed in didn't seem to please that evil blinking square. At work, many of us had these main frame computers that were the size of two-bedroom apartments. And you fed them punch cards to spit out stuff you'd otherwise type on a, you guessed it, a typewriter. One gent recalls these little trains running on tracks high on the walls with box cars loaded with these punch cards throughout the building. How times have changed. One thing that never changes is the great tips from our bargain hunter extraordinaire. And this weekend being Veteran's Day, the sales and deals were plentiful. You could see a coupon for a "Free Adult" sticking out of his inbox pocket. Not sure how many of us would take advantage of such an offer until he pulled out the coupon and it was actually for a "Free Adult Meal".

Staying with the technology theme, another gent was telling us about their new Smart TV, and all the wonderful programs you can now receive as well as the ability to simply talk to the remote control to change channels, adjust the volume, or to shut off the set. Apparently, the misses wishes that remote would work equally well on hubby, but alas no such luck (sorry Swede-Heart, they haven't advanced the technology that far, yet). You'll have to be content with the old cattle prod or the volume control on your own voice. Moving along from snookums to bunions, did you know there is a surgical procedure called a bunionectomy to remove those nasty things! Seems as folks transition from running to walking (for exercise that is, not as response to that lady shouting at you with a TV remote in her hand) these bunions become more of a nuisance. But alas, there's relief as I discovered for \$39.95 you can get a Bunion Bootie that you wear on your foot to separate the big toe from the other toes to help temporarily improve toe alignment. News you can use.

Our lesson for the day was provided by Wilbur. He used a lesson from the ELCA.org web site, which was the *Daily Discipleship* lesson for Sunday, November 6-12, and focused on **Matthew 25:1-13**, and the challenge of *Readiness*, and how we get ready for an event at an unknown time and place, which comes from **Mathew 25:13** – "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour". Throughout the lesson we also read other passages from different books in the Bible (Hosea, Isaiah, Revelation) to try and decipher the symbolism and meaning of the different characters and terms used in various lessons. We also read these passages from different versions of the Bible to see the different interpretations/translations and if the message remained consistent.

We first took turns reading **Matthew 25:1-13**, the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids that is found only in Matthew's Gospel. The parable falls in the middle of Jesus' teaching about the end times (**Matt 24:1 -- 25:46**). He is speaking to his disciples while sitting on the Mount of Olives, looking at the Temple grounds (**Matt 24:1-3**) after having left the temple and a verbal battle with the scribes and Pharisees. The disciples come to Jesus privately (**Matt 24:3**) to ask about the signs of the end of the age. Jesus uses several analogies to stress the need to live faithfully and expectantly, to watch and remain ready.

The image in this week's parable of the bridegroom is found in both the Old and New Testaments to describe the covenantal relationship between God and God's people. We then read **Hosea 2:14-23** (concerning Israel's Infidelity, Punishment, and Redemption); **Isaiah 62:5** (the bridegroom rejoicing over his bride just as God rejoices overreach of us); and **Revelation 22:17** (the bride and the gift of the water of life). A typical ritual at a wedding would have the bridegroom coming with his companions to the house of the bride's parents to take her to his own home. As the groom approaches, the bridesmaids would come out with lighted lamps and meet him. The group then discussed how helpful or meaningful the images were of the bride and bridegroom, as well as the bridesmaids and the lamps/oil to describe the relationship between God and His people as well as how the challenge of being ready was presented/addressed.

We noted the opening verse of the parable: “*Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this*” uses the word “*then*” and the tense of the verb implies something that will happen in the future. We compared this opening with other “*kingdom*” parables in **Matthew 13:24** (sowing seeds in a field), **:31** (the mustard seed), **:33** (yeast), **:44** (a treasure hidden in a field), **:45** (merchant searching for pearls), and **:47** (a fishing net cast into the sea) which begin in the present tense: “*The kingdom of heaven is like...*” While the parables in **Matthew 13** emphasize the mystery of the kingdom already present in the world, the future tense of the parable of the bridesmaids points to a time when the presence of the kingdom will be clearly seen and understood. The parable begins with grace. At first, all ten bridesmaids, wise or foolish, are equal members of the wedding party. All are to be included in the celebration. Both the foolish and the wise are prepared for the ordinary, usual events. But as in other parables in Matthew, grace calls for a “wise” response. We then discussed what message of grace and challenge (how we are to make ourselves ready to receive our grace) was in the parable.

The challenging question for the church of Matthew’s day (and no different than what we face today) is: How are we to live during the “in-between” time – the time between the inbreaking of the kingdom of heaven in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the promised coming of the victorious Christ at the end of the age? Do we trust in One whose presence is not readily seen? The answer Jesus speaks in Matthew’s Gospel is to live a life of active faithfulness, of doing what we believe. The group then discussed the characteristics of a faithful disciple who waits and prepares for Christ’s coming and what it means to live a life of active faithfulness. There was pretty unanimous consent that it is very challenging in today’s world to display an “active faithfulness” as so many people are drifting away from the church and see a need to politicize (and as such polarize) any discussions or outright displays of religious beliefs. How sad.

Our last discussion centered on a short story we read of a man whose dream was to play the role of Joseph in the Christmas Story play. He had the role down pat and anxiously looked forward to his discovery as a star. The play’s director was pregnant with a baby girl during rehearsals, and gave birth such that the baby in the pageant would now be a living, breathing (and soon to be discovered) crying child of God. The weeks prior to Christmas were spent preparing. As the shepherds arrived on stage after their fear-filled encounter with the heavenly host, Joseph was to gently pick up the child, cradle her in his arms with fatherly compassion, and hold her as the shepherds worshipped and adored.

Naturally, rehearsals went smoothly; the baby was adorable, a helpful supporting cast member for his acting debut. But the night of the performance was a different story. As Joseph picked up the child, she began to cry. He tried rocking her back and forth as he had seen the director do, but the cries only increased. How could this future star emote love and compassion holding a screaming baby? The child was stealing his moment to shine! Finally, in desperation, Joseph gave the baby to Mary, who wrapped the blanket (which he had forgotten to pick up with the child) around the cold infant; and of course, the crying stopped. Afterwards, our star to be was glum and disappointed. His big moment had been upstaged by a crying baby. But many said that they experienced Christ’s coming in a new and meaningful way through that shivering, crying child.

Christ came that night. The boy, as Joseph, was ready, but not fully prepared. He knew his part, but had forgotten the most important role. He was so busy with his own aspirations that he failed to see the precious gift represented in his arms. So we as a group discussed how we face the challenge of waiting for Christ; what distracts us from our waiting (i.e., dealing with the unexpected events in our lives); how do we prepare as we wait for Christ (ways we reaffirm our own faith); and lastly, how do we face the challenge of being ready for Christ to return?

We ended the lesson and our discussions with a short prayer “*Christ, calm our impatient hearts as we wait for your return*”. It was a wonderful lesson, inspiring lots of discussion, and challenging as well as we tried to tie together the Old and New Testament stories, symbolism and message(s) to our own sense of *readiness* as disciples of Christ.

Our final LCOC Men’s Prayer Breakfast for the year will be Saturday, 9 December 2017. As is our tradition, we will be remembering and serving up our traditional Stew Conklin biscuits and sausage gravy breakfast, always a favorite. And none of that chicken sausage, skim milk, non-wheat flour or “can’t believe it’s not butter” stuff. Nope, this is the REAL thing my friends. And real biscuits (well, as real as the Pillsbury Doughboy can make them). And maybe by then our bargain-meister may have coupons for a Bunion Bootie! Great Christmas gift! So please plan on joining us.