

"The Party of the Way"
November 8, 2020; 10:00 am
Matthew 25:1-13
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

The Story of the Virgins

25 ¹⁻⁵ "God's kingdom is like ten young virgins who took oil lamps and went out to greet the bridegroom. Five were silly and five were smart. The silly virgins took lamps, but no extra oil. The smart virgins took jars of oil to feed their lamps. The bridegroom didn't show up when they expected him, and they all fell asleep.

⁶ "In the middle of the night someone yelled out, 'He's here! The bride-groom's here! Go out and greet him!'

⁷⁻⁸ "The ten virgins got up and got their lamps ready. The silly virgins said to the smart ones, 'Our lamps are going out; lend us some of your oil.'

⁹ "They answered, 'There might not be enough to go around; go buy your own.'

¹⁰ "They did, but while they were out buying oil, the bridegroom arrived. When everyone who was there to greet him had gone into the wedding feast, the door was locked.

¹¹ "Much later, the other virgins, the silly ones, showed up and knocked on the door, saying, 'Master, we're here. Let us in.'

¹² "He answered, 'Do I know you? I don't think I know you.'

¹³ "So stay alert. You have no idea when he might arrive.

I. GET READY! CHANGE IS COMING!

25 ¹⁻⁵ "God's kingdom is like ten young virgins who took oil lamps and went out to greet the bridegroom. Five were silly and five were smart. The silly virgins took lamps, but no extra oil. The smart virgins took jars of oil to feed their lamps. The bridegroom didn't show up when they expected him, and they all fell asleep.

This peculiar story about the "Ten maids waiting for the Bridegroom" comes to us today—in *our* "peculiar moment." In this "time between times"—this "space between," and in the midst of, seasons of *many* kinds.

Sure, it's what's assigned in the Lectionary for this second week in November, Year C, but I believe it's *more* than that. I believe Spirit speaks to us in all sorts of ways, and on different days. This was the passage for *this* day—not an accident, but a divine synchronicity, perhaps.

The Parable of the Kingdom told by Jesus came to Matthew's community in the first century in equally perplexing and ever-changing times. Its message was puzzling for the Early Church, as it might be for us today, unless we go "behind the story" and dig deep, as Jesus' parables often require.

To understand what this scripture might be saying to us, now, today, in our odd, "betwixt and between time," we need to look with *fresh eyes*—use a sort of "second sight to see." It compels to look at **change** through new eyes—because we, as people, and especially as Christ's Church really don't like change much! But change has been around for a long time.

EVEN “in the good old days” of the Church of Jesus Christ, in the 1st century!

Rev. George Hermanson says:

“Matthew is telling his community here that change has begun and one needs to be awake to see it. It takes ‘second sight’ to see. A kind of “double-vision” given to us through faith. It means waking up and staying awake...to see simultaneously from *within* the issues and from without - from the personal to the universal needs.

When the Bridegroom arrives, reality has been changed! The old ways of doing things no longer sustain. This calls for new eyes, second sight, because, in such times there is a desire to move back to the **familiar**, to return to safety of the how we have done it in the past. The status quo feels good and like those maids who did not bring enough oil, it freezes us in the past and we are not awake - we miss the transformational moment.

We are called to join with others who work for the transformation of our whole society, where the image is of ALL—gathered at the Table.”

II. GET READY! FOR WHAT?

¹³ “So stay alert,” says Jesus. “You have no idea when he, the Bridegroom, might arrive.”

So.....

What are *we* getting ready for? How should we be prepared? To BE the Church, the faithful, no matter what happens?

Many have predicted life will be tumultuous and even *more* conflicted in our country after this election. And, they may well be right!

You see, the “disturbances in the field” goes far below the surface and far back into our history—farther back than the matter of who is in the White House and who has a majority in Congress.

The disturbances are in our *soil*, in our collective DNA. Racism is the sea we swim in. It’s built into our land. We cannot escape it, nor can we deny it to our peril as humanity. History *must* be looked at, delved-into honestly, apologized-for, forgiven, but most definitely *not* forgotten!

Most especially as white people and the white church. We have an oppressive, harmful, even murderous, legacy as a country, and a religion, and it’s not just us, but throughout the whole wide world.

So, regardless of who is in the White House, and regardless of how the transition to this next term goes for everyone, let’s focus on our own “white house” and the Beloved Community and Church of God and Jesus Christ—who live there—everywhere.

Let’s consider the lilies, the sparrows, the Beloved Children of God, of every skin tone, background, class, caste, faith tradition and walk of life.

We have a huge and incontrovertible responsibility, given our place and race to *lead* this movement.

Toward dignity, equality, inclusion and love for ALL.

That's what God calls us to. What Jesus would do—whatever this election brings us.

We are called to rise above it all – not to silence the further indifference, or continue hiding in our little bubble. But to rise up TO the call of humanity.

We are Christians above all—followers of Jesus Christ—and that is our absolute core identity and ultimate loyalty. There's a lot of confusion about that in the American church of today. "America First" is *not* the faithful chant of a faithful Christian.

Our God, first, our neighbor—ALL neighbors—everywhere—and ourselves as beloved children of God second,—that is our loyalty, our legacy and our identity and call.

The time for partisan politics is most definitely over. Election season is one. Thanks be to God!

How then shall we live?

How then shall we love?

What does it look like, in very concrete terms and actions, to love:

Our God, our neighbor, every neighbor—far and near—and ourselves AS beloved children—of a God of love and compassion for all—first and foremost.

We are called for such a time as this.

To show the way. To walk the Way of Christ.

It's not a Republican or Democrat, Independent or Libertarian Way. It's the Way of Jesus—AS the Body of Christ.

Just like those earliest disciples and followers were called: "The People of the Way."

How about: "The Party of the Way"—let's be THAT!

We are a Purple Church—we are not solely Red or Blue—forced into a category that some would attempt to impose—but Purple. All of the above—a 3rd Party of the Jesus Way.

I'm writing and recording this *before* Election Day. So, that's a little peculiar too, just like our story, and these times we live in. But. It doesn't ultimately **matter**. We might still not know the outcome—either of the vote counting or the aftermath—which could be emotional and volatile.

It. Doesn't. Matter.

"Don't tell me who you voted for, but how you treat those who vote differently from you."

III. GET READY! GET TO THE TABLE!

Let's go back to our story. First a spoiler—the two groups of women are really not that different! It's easy to gloss over the details and think, "Oh, that's easy Jesus! One group fell asleep, were lazy, and the other didn't! So, we just gotta stay awake and watch for

your 2nd coming. Read our bibles, go to Church, sing our hymns and pray.”

Well.....but look at vs. 5 again:

The bridegroom didn't show up when they expected him, and they all fell asleep.

They ALL fell asleep! They all might be just a little guilty of complacency, indifference, being asleep at the wheel. Maybe they just didn't want to wear their masks all the time. Those COVID cases are happening in *other* places, not here, right?

Maybe they're tired of the unrest in our country and world over racism—can't we just hide in our bubble? We don't have that problem here, right? Maybe the political ads are just *too* much, and the voter's manual is just too much work to wade through, so we'll just vote down the ticket of our Party and trust, that what's “good for the economy” and for *my* family will be good for all.

⁶“In the middle of the night someone yelled out, ‘He's here! The bride-groom's here! Go out and greet him!’ ⁷⁻⁸“The ten virgins got up and got their lamps ready. The silly virgins said to the smart ones, ‘Our lamps are going out; lend us some of your oil.’

⁹“They answered, ‘There might not be enough to go around; **go buy your own.**’ ¹⁰“They did, but while they were out buying oil, the bridegroom arrived. When everyone who was there to greet him had gone into the wedding feast, the door was locked.

So, they were all tired of it all, and they all fell asleep. *That's* not the difference between the silly ones and the

smart ones. The difference between the two groups—as they all had lamps and they all took them, dressed up to the nines, and went out to meet the Bridegroom.

The *difference* is one group thought they ought to **share**, so that all would have enough, and the others thought it was “each for her own!”

Now, we could go down a rabbit trail of “but they had plenty of chances,” “why are we enabling bad behavior,” why should *they* get help when I pulled myself up by my own bootstraps, got my own dang extra oil, how is that fair?” You know the mantra!

But, it *might* be that in God's kingdom—which this parable is about, *our* call, our marching orders, from Jesus—are to do “all of the above.” Not just one thing or another, and not just think about “what's fair!”

We are, says Jesus, to:

A) “be prepared; be alert!

Don't be indifferent or live by default;

B) Wake up to what you haven't wanted to see and acknowledge before in the world around you, and

C) Offer grace --

to others, when, whether by their own complacency, or an un-level playing field that has kept them from access to resources—they don't have enough—and, regardless of the back story, we who *do* have enough, can SHARE what we have.

If the righteous, well-prepared ones had extended grace and a helping hand, rather than telling the others “go buy your own”, then *all* would have been welcomed into the Banquet. All brought to the Table. No one left out in the cold.

For to Jesus, the Bridegroom—It. doesn't. matter.

It doesn't matter who is in the White House. It doesn't matter who might have been sleeping, or perceived as lazy, or unprepared in any way. By their own doing, or by being caught in an oppressive caste system that prevented their being first in line—with a full reserve of oil or resources of any kind.

What matters to Jesus, to God, and to all who comprise the Body of Christ, is that the doors are UNLOCKED, the summons is given, and all—*every* body and soul, every tongue, skin color, orientation, gender identity, tradition and origin, every class, every pedigree, every educational degree level, and migrant or economic status of ANY kind—all are brought to the Table.

If they need help getting there—getting a place, a vote, a comfy chair, we who are able are compelled—no commanded, exhorted, and strongly encouraged to reach out a hand—lift up, enclose in our “socially-distant but spiritually-connected arms”, embrace and gather in!

What matters to Jesus is that we don't just “stay alert.” But that we “Be woke!” *Do* something. Get involved. We've seen what doing nothing does. Whether with a deadly virus, or with an economy that's *not* trickling down and the rich get richer and poor get left out in the cold—literally. Or, where civil rights go under the rug for decades or centuries, or are squashed in the name (or game!) of “religious freedom.”

Be alert! Be woke! The Bridegroom is coming! Will we be ready, with extra reserves on hand for everyone to have enough? The invitation is sent out!

Let us come to the Table of our Lord—to our Communal Life together. Today, tomorrow, this week, this month, this year. One and all. Lamps lit, reserves filled, oil in abundance, shared and overflowing. Amen.