

Devotion: Thursday, April 23, 2020 at 2:29 PM EDT

Matthew 25:1-13

The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

‘Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, “Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.” Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” But the wise replied, “No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.” And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, “Lord, lord, open to us.” But he replied, “Truly I tell you, I do not know you.” Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

“The waiting is the hardest part. Every day you see one more card. You take it on faith, You take it to the heart. The waiting is the hardest part.” ---Tom Petty

The late Mr. Petty nailed it. Now, more than ever, as we live in a culture where waiting is often seen as a waste of time.

I think the theme of “waiting” may be a good approach to this parable by Jesus. Jesus shows us that not all waiting is the same. Waiting for something good – the birth of a healthy child, the closing on the house of your dreams, the promotion in a job or acceptance from college and now waiting for a “normal” again – is a lot different than waiting for something that is hard – waiting to see if this time you will be able to get pregnant, or for the foreclosure of your home because you couldn’t make the payment, or the doctor’s report confirming that the cancer has returned, or waiting for a “Normal” again.

And whether you are waiting for something good or bad, when the anticipated arrival is delayed, it’s almost always stressful: why haven’t I heard from the college admissions office? Have they arrived safely? When will we hear from the doctor? The waiting, as Tom says, is the hardest part.

So what can we learn about waiting? Two responses. When the waiting is for something positive, can we slow down to see in the moments of preparation and anticipation a blessing. Once it’s here – the baby, the job, the acceptance, going outside, life will take on its own new and likely hectic timing. Can waiting at times be seen as gift rather than obstacle? We should practice waiting for those things we look forward so it can help us to increase our patience and perseverance in other areas.

When waiting is not for something positive, or when it is made harder by delay, can we assure people that they will not wait alone? The tragedy in the parable is that five of the bridesmaids took no oil at all. They didn't run out. They just didn't bring any, making no plans, anticipating no delay. And there is something to learn here. But the less obvious, but sad truth, is that the five who had brought "flasks of oil" would not share. Why do they assume there will not be enough for all? The announcement of the groom's arrival had already been made, after all. Can we also learn from the wise but ungenerous bridesmaids and not force people to wait alone, we can share our patience, so that no one in our communities has the isolating experience of being locked out by virus or their past.

We often wonder what we can do as communities of faith to make what we offer more attractive to a culture that wants nothing to do with organized religion. Maybe we could offer ourselves as a genuine community in a world where more and more people feel isolated? A community that celebrates together. That slows down to prepare together. And that waits together, making sure when the waiting is the hardest part that no one – not one person – has to wait alone? The waiting is the hardest part in the stressful time we live. We can't change that reality, but we can change the experience by waiting together, in Christian solidarity, community, and fellowship.

Let us pray:

Creator God, I want to live in the shadow of Your wing. When life is hard, and I don't know what to do, help me remember that You are with me and that I am never alone. I cannot live without You. I cannot face tomorrow without the promise of Your presence. Today I choose to walk and live under the protection of You, The Most High. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Stay safe

Pastor Jack