

## **Saint Matthew's/San Mateo Episcopal Church**

**Pentecost 23, Proper 27, November 8, 2020**

### **READINGS:**

Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16

Canticle: (A Song of the Love of Wisdom) - Wisdom 6:17-20

I Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today our readings speak to us about wisdom, and foolishness, AND being part of God's Kingdom.

If you think for a minute, could you tell a story about someone being foolish?

Could you tell a story about someone who is wise?

Are you sometimes wise?

Have you ever been the foolish one?

I know I have been both!

In our Gospel reading from Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples a story about ten young women at a wedding party. "The kingdom of heaven will be like this," Jesus tells the disciples. "Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise."

In Jesus' day, marriage celebrations began when the bridegroom and his friends went to the bride's house to bring her to the couple's new home, usually at night.

Young women of both families would attend the bride. The bridesmaids from the groom's family would wait at his house until the wedding party came.

There was no set time for the wedding party to arrive. They could be late because of last-minute haggling over the "bride price" paid by the bride's family to the family of the groom, or because the groom was having a little joke with them, or for many other reasons.

But no matter when they got there, all the guests were expected to be ready for the wedding banquet to begin.

In Jesus' story, the wise bridesmaids know they need to be ready immediately when the bridegroom arrives. They come prepared! They bring extra oil for their lamps.

The foolish bridesmaids, however, are not ready! They have to run out at the last minute, in the middle of the night, to buy oil. The door is shut, and they do not get in.

In this story, the Risen Jesus is the bridegroom. We are the watchers, waiting with our lamps every minute of our lives to receive him when he comes again.

"There's the wisdom," says Jesuit priest John Kavanaugh.

"We never know the hour or the day. All ten bridesmaids, recall, were asleep. The difference is that five of them were prepared...To be wise, then...is to spend the present moment - the waiting - well."

Being ready does take practice, but our readings from the book of Wisdom today are encouraging to us. Our reading tells us that wisdom is easily found. Wisdom actually goes about seeking those worthy of her! Wisdom appears "in their paths, and meets them in every thought."

So, what should wise Christians do while waiting?

Well, Jesus also told a story about a wise man who built his house on a rock and a foolish man who built on sand. At the end of that story, Jesus said that wisdom is HEARING God's Word and DOING it. The wise hear. The wise do something about what they hear!

When my husband Bob was in the Navy in Japan, he was assigned to take a van, a driver, and a couple of other sailors from the base all the way around Tokyo Bay. They were to pick up

parts for a F-8 Crusader that needed repair. All went well, except that on the way back, they were involved in a traffic accident.

Tokyo streets are narrow, and the van driver brushed his side mirror on the side mirror of a truck passing the other way. Both mirrors fell off. The truck driver and his passenger, Bob and the sailors, and a small group of interested onlookers found themselves waiting for the Japanese traffic police to arrive on scene.

By the time the police came, everybody was getting a little bit excited. There was a small language problem, because the sailors had only limited Japanese, and the police and truck driver only limited English. Bob thought the situation could use a little "lightening up," and when he looked around for help, he saw a sign that said "Ice Cream" in Japanese - an ice cream store!

While the police looked the damage over and heard from the bystanders, from Bob's driver, and from the truck driver, Bob took a quick headcount and hustled into the ice cream shop. Once everybody (including the police) had an ice cream in hand, the situation settled down quickly. The police finished their paperwork while the ice creams disappeared. The truck, the police, the bystanders, AND the van full of airplane parts and sailors went their different ways with everybody happy.

Sometimes wisdom is as simple as the quick application of ice cream! Those who know Bob know his capacity for thinking "outside the box."

But, we cannot borrow the "oil" we need to enter God's kingdom from a neighbor, or even from a friend. Each of us has our own relationship with God. Each of us makes choices every day that prepare us for Jesus' return, or don't. Our actions and the "oil" for our lamps are unique to us!

All the things that we should do that we don't do, or that we just put off doing, can drain our oil and make us "not ready - not prepared" when the call to the wedding feast comes. The Greek word "gregoreo" is translated "Keep awake" in our reading. My commentary says it can also be translated "Be prepared."

Judith Carrick in her 2005 sermon "Let Justice Roll Down," has this to say about preparation:

"Do the choices we make leave us too busy to give God what God deserves? Do these things take precedence over our spiritual lives? Is there some group in our church that we've thought about joining but have never gotten around to it? Is there someone in our family we need to make peace with, or perhaps an elderly neighbor who would be cheered by a phone

call or a plate of supper?....Jesus' challenge to us is that we demonstrate by the way we live that we are part of his celebration at every moment. We are ready."

John Kavanaugh reminds us: "Eternity is now. And God is with us. All that we need to do is be alert."

And Saint Paul reminds us today in his letter to the Thessalonians that when the Lord returns, we will be with him forever.

THAT is what we don't want to miss!

Amen.