## Matthew 25:1-13

"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.

**Keeping Awake**
Matthew 25:1-13

Sunday November 8, 2026

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**I.**

Forgot something, have to run out, I'll be right back. *Drop sheets, pause, look befuddled, sit down, start again.* Read sheets: "**People**" "**Hate**" "**To**" "**Wait**" - **Read Scripture.**

Biblical scholarship tells us that Matthew was written within a Jewish context to people who could understand that Jesus was both the **fulfiller** and **fulfillment** of God's will as disclosed in the Hebrew scriptures. However, Matthew was written some 40 years, *after* the death and resurrection of Christ. So in today's passage we find either a warning from *Jesus* on the future, or a warning *extrapolated* from Jesus words written by a person to a community who all have been waiting 40 years for the other shoe to drop. In either scenario, these are words written for people just like us. People who hate to wait.

**II.**

Now, I know that at least some of you came to church today hoping to hear some wily sermon based on the mid-term elections. Sorry, I am steering far clear of that. Instead, though, I'm going to regale you the wildest story *any* of us have ever heard. As Christians, we believe there once was an actual flesh and blood person named Jesus who was born, or incarnated, and went on to live among us for 30 years, discovering all the best and worst of the human condition. At a point, and we don't exactly know what triggered this, Jesus embarked upon a three year ministry of teaching, healing, and reconciliation. Then, his ministry came to an abrupt, although not unanticipated, conclusion. When he became too threatening to the powers that be and the socio-economic status quo, they endeavored to remove him from the situation.

**III.**

Meaning, Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. Although his followers believed that this signaled the end of the story, *life*, not death, was the final victor. Three days later, Jesus was resurrected as the *Christ*. The one through whom the entire world is saved, as Jesus serves as the ultimate atonement. Not just for the sins *individual* believers, but for the sins of the *entire* creation. Which, as the Apostle Paul says, has been groaning in travail until this time. Then, prior to his ascension to heaven, Christ promised to return again and usher in a new existence when and where God's love and justice would rule supreme. This is the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. This, is the first Shoe, and it has already dropped. *(Drop shoe from pulpit.)*

**IV.**

But this other Shoe, *this* is the Shoe of Promise. The promise of Jesus that says, *"I will come again, and I will take you where I am going, for there are many rooms in my Father's house."* This is the promise of God's return, of a future where Christ is finally, and fully, present with us. *This* shoe, however has not yet dropped. T*his* promise is not yet complete. So, for the past 2000 years we have been waiting, just as we wait today, for the fulfillment of God's presence with us. As people of faith, we find ourselves existing somewhere between here…and there. *(Tape sheet between shoes on pulpit.).* Somewhere in between "the already," and "the not yet." In a place, space, and time, where we can enjoy and dwell in the action God has *already* taken in Christ and, with hopeful anticipation, wait upon the promised return of Godnwhich has *not yet* occurred.

**V.**

The early church of Matthew's Gospel called this promised return the *Parousia*. *(Tape sheet saying "Parousia," on the pulpit under the shoe.).* This Greek word, Parousia, was used at that time in a general sense to denote "presence," but also "arrival" or "coming." The early Christians, however, transliterated the word and adopted it as a technical term for the future, eschatological coming of Christ. This was the foundational cornerstone of hope for the early church which was enduring persecution and hard times. The hope in the glorious return of Christ at the end of the age when the world would be judged, and the entire creation redeemed. So, the early church had an expectation of the *immediate* return of Christ, in their life-times.

**VI.**

We can well imagine, then, that 40 years into it the people of Matthew's Gospel were saying enough is enough already; joke not funny, gone too far. As months stretched into years, there had to a reassessment of the Parousia. Therefore, we see in the bible, a shift in the thinking of the first century churches from a belief in an *imminent* Parousia, to a struggling with the question of what they are to do while they await for the Parousia which has been so obviously been delayed? This, then, is the context of today's scripture reading from Matthew 25 the parable of the 10 bridesmaids, 5 of whom are wise and 5 of whom are foolish.

**VII.**

The church is likened unto a bridesmaid waiting for the Parousia… waiting for the return of Christ the bridegroom. But as the wait grows longer, much longer than anyone anticipated, those whose lamps go out find themselves missing the bridegroom's arrival because they weren't prepared as they did not bring enough oil with them to last through the night. The hearers of this parable are admonished to "*Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour*" of the arrival of God's presence among you. This passage, peculiar to Matthew's Gospel, warns us to be prepared, for God's return will most surely be at a time we do not expect. And if we are not ready, we may be left behind.

**VIII.**

Clearly, these are words of encouragement to those holding fast to their belief in the Parousia forty years after the cross. What about us, though? We who are still holding fast to this now ancient belief in the Parousia, *2000* years after the cross? At the evangelical Presbyterian Church in which I grew up, this kind of passage was used to encourage the believer in their waiting Moreover, it put the unbeliever on notice that there is a dire cost for being unprepared. Though I certainly can appreciate such an understanding, I am now more mature in my faith. I believe a more insightful interpretation of this passage, therefore, is as an encouragement to those who have not yet come to believe that they should stop waiting to do so *and*, more importantly, to put the believer on notice that there is a dire cost for not embracing the Parousia which is *already* happening all around us.

**IX.**

Will Christ return at the end of the age? Surely. That said, for the most part, Christians have become so fixated on *this* understanding of the Parousia, that for the past 2000 years we have come to miss the simple truth that if it is Christ's presence for which we are looking, we need look no further than the Christ who is present with us right *here* and right *now*. To some, I would say, Christ has *already* found us, why is it then you are acting like you still need to look? However, to others I would say, if we only look for Christ at the end which has *not yet* come, we are bound to miss Christ who is *already* present with us! How, though, do we seek, and where do find? By beginning the journey where the first shoe fell, and preparing the way for the second shoe which is falling even now. The trick, is keeping awake.

**X.**

Now, if you managed to keep yourself awake and attentive to all I just said which, admittedly, was pretty dry, you may be happy to discover a reward for such waiting. A treat for the trick, if you will. This past week I was the subject of some pretty poignant matriarchal chastisement. This was in no way unwarranted. In fact, it was invited. Nonetheless, while welcome in the abstract the actual *experience* of *being* chastised, no matter how lovingly it might be done, always takes a bit of time to work its way past our personal defenses (our, "yes, but…" or "what about?") so as to allow what is being said in real love and with genuine wisdom to actually sink into one's head and heart. So it was that this past Wednesday, at our monthly worship service at Partridge Knoll, that Janet Stitt and Pastor Donna Doig got after old Rev. Mike and told him in no uncertain terms that he is not waiting very well these days when it comes to our church.

**XI.**

Not only am I causing myself a great deal of consternation by longing too much for the "not yet" to hurry up and arrive, in doing so I am missing out on much of the "already" which is clearly occurring even now. More problematic, though, is that I keep banging my head against the wall trying to figure out a way for *me* to hasten the church of the "not yet" to arrive sooner. Which, as both Donna and Janet were quick to point out, is not *my* responsibility or *my* work to do. This, they stated in no uncertain terms, is the responsibility of the congregation and, in particular, the Elders on Session.

**XII.**

I do not mind telling you that this chastisement, though done in love, nevertheless gave me much on which to chew in the ensuing days. Friday found me up on the roof of the cottage cleaning leafs from the gutters which, seemingly, served to clear some cobwebs from my brain. Completely unprompted and unexpected, I had a rush of realization about our church. Not that I could not see these things before this from an objective, external perspective, but suddenly a kind of warmth spread out within me. Less an idea or mental concept and more a feeling or sense of joy, well-being and, dare I say it, excitement. The result was a pervasive feeling of gratitude which infused the rest of the weekend. I was able to see our church perhaps not with new eyes, but with what I would term "Glad Eyes."

What I saw was kids, nursery through high school making up a growing percentage of the congregation. I saw new people and families attending worship, I saw people who have been here awhile stepping back into leadership roles. I saw people at ease with themselves, and genuinely happy to see each other. I saw people laughing and smiling. I saw people sharing their gifts through music.

**XIII.**

I saw people tuning into the stream week in and week out, sometimes even in the same proportion as those worshipping in-person. I saw young families speaking with each other at coffee hour, sharing their lives. I saw kids having fun, and enjoying not only a sense of belonging *in* the church, but ownership *of* the church. I saw the congregation eating and talking and enjoying each other's company, lingering in Fellowship Hall long after worship had ended. I saw hope, I saw promise, I saw the future of our church. And, after I had seen all of this, I had to admit to myself that all to often I do get too focused on the "not yet" and thereby miss the "already." My guess, however, is that I am not alone in this. Personally, I have no great desire to get off this ride; this church in specific and life in general as I am enjoying it, *immensely*.

**XIV.**

Yes, it often feels like we're never going to get there. We feel like those to whom Matthew wrote, growing impatient at the delay in the Parousia.

Like those to whom Jesus tells the parable of the 10 Bridesmaids who grow idle, bored, and drowsy struggling to keep awake even though the presence of God is already in our midst; here on the Park at this church, here in this congregation, here in our lives, and here in our world.

Though I believe it will always be in our nature to foolishly hate to wait, I also believe we are wise enough to know the only choice we have *while* we wait is what we will do with the time we have before the other shoe drops. Let us keep our lamps trimmed and burning keeping awake in each other the very presence of God here in our midst. For *this*, as Janet and Donna remind us, is what the kingdom of heaven looks like. Amen.