

## **WAITING AND WATCHING. . .WATCHING AND WAITING**

This Sunday November 12, our Gospel lesson is again one of the parables of Jesus (Matthew 25: 1-13). This parable tells the story of the foolish and the wise bridesmaids (virgins, in some translations) and is considered an “eschatological” parable—one telling of the final times. Eschatology is the teaching concerning last things such as the resurrection of the dead, the last judgement, the end of this world, and the creation of a new one with the return of Christ. The parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids is one of four eschatological parables Jesus tells at the end of what is called The Olivet Discourse in which Jesus answered *His* disciples’ three questions about the end of the age, the sign of *His* coming, and when “these things” would take place. These eschatological parables are: The faithful and unfaithful servants (Matt 24: 45-51); The wise and the foolish bridesmaids (Matt 25:1-13); The parable of the talents (Matt 25: 14-30); and the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31-46). Our final two Sundays in the church year (Nov 19 & Nov 26) will have as the Gospel lessons the parable of the talents and the parable of the sheep and the goats. What better timing to consider the “Last Things” as we close out the season of Pentecost and prepare once again for celebrating our Lord’s “first coming”—His Nativity?

The expectation of Christ’s return is central to Christian living. Like the other Gospels, Matthew is clear that the timing of Christ’s return is unknown. The unknown timing of Christ’s return makes readiness essential. The parable of the ten bridesmaids is sandwiched between two passages that emphasize preparation for the master’s return. The prior passage, Matthew 24:45-51, contrasts the “faithful and wise slave” who is at work when his master comes with the self-indulgent slave who mistreats others and is surprised by the master’s return. The passage that follows this one, Matthew 25:14-30, is a parable in which the master entrusts his property to his slaves and expects their diligent investment of it. Both of these parables emphasize the actions of the slaves in the absence of the master.—what they do while awaiting his return.

What is distinctive about the parable of the 10 bridesmaids is its focus on the delayed return of the expected one. The passage does not simply call for right action in the groom’s absence. It calls for recognition that he may be delayed. In this parable alone, the wise or prudent disciple is the one who prepares not only for the groom’s return, but also for his delay. If the groom was coming quickly there would be nothing wrong with taking one’s lamp full of oil to meet him. But the wise disciple packs a supply of oil, knowing that the wait may be unpredictable.

It is difficult for many of us to be anything like the bridesmaids, wise or foolish, because we have stopped waiting. We give little thought to Christ’s return, let alone what we should do to prepare for it. After the passage of two millennia, we have grown accustomed to the master’s absence. It’s a long time to wait expectantly. Yet, this parable asks us to imagine ourselves as those who wait for the groom’s return. When the groom comes, the wedding feast may begin! The wedding feast initiates the reign of God’s justice and mercy, the realization of all the hopes of God’s people. To act as wise bridesmaids is to affirm our faith in the coming Christ. The wise bridesmaids keep the vision of Christ’s return, and all that it stands for, alive through their faithful waiting in the midst of delay. By preparing for the day, the timing of which no one knows but God, they proclaim that God’s promises are true. They act out their hope for that day when God will establish justice and righteousness and peace. Amen. . .Come Lord Jesus!

***Come and Worship the Lord  
Give thanks and honor to our Veterans  
Proclaim that God’s promises are true  
Sunday 10 AM***