

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 25: 1-13

"Your Care Plan – Be Prepared"

I know that some of you have been involved in Scouting – Mom's, Dad's and men – you know the scout motto is "Be Prepared." If I had to sum up today's Holy Gospel reading from Matthew 25: 1-13 I would have to say that "Be Prepared" would be a perfect fit.

What has been labeled by many as the "the Parable of the Ten Virgins" could also be called "the Five Wise Bridesmaids" or "the Five Foolish Bridesmaids." It depends on how you look at the glass – is the glass half empty; is the glass half full; or are you just grateful that you have a glass? Titles aside - what matters most is being ready; being prepared; being wise; thinking ahead, realizing that a crisis is coming sooner or later and that if you don't make preparations now, and keep them in good shape in the meantime, you'll wish you had. We know that hurricane season is from June to December. How many of us have a kit prepared? Just in case – with food, with water, in preparation. I know that people who live in Florida are more so to do that, we are pretty protected 'inland' but it can still get pretty nasty. It is part of being prepared.

I believe it is very important for us to examine the roots of this parable that are deep in the Jewish context that has alerted thousands to be aware of the coming of the bridegroom. In Jewish background, very simply put, when someone is betrothed – as Mary and Joseph were – when the time comes – the one who calls the shots on the wedding is the father of the 'bridegroom!' The bridegroom has prepared a place in his father's house for them to live. Only when it is ready – to the satisfaction of the bridegroom – he tells the bridegroom to 'go get her!' Everybody has to be ready to act. Jesus is the bridegroom and He has said *"I go to prepare a place for you... that where I am you may be also."* (John 14:2-3) He has called the church, the fellowship of believers – 'the bride.' There will be a time when He comes – as Paul wrote in his letter to the Thessalonians – in power and great glory – with a trumpet blast to alert us that He is coming. As Jesus said – no one knows the hour or the day (Matthew 24:36)

Jesus has already referred to Himself as the bridegroom. This is in response to a question from John the Baptist's followers: *"How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"* Jesus answered, *"How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast."* (Matthew 9:14-15). In another parable in Matthew 22:2 Jesus spoke of the kingdom as being like a king making a marriage feast for his son. Just the mention of a bridegroom hints at Jesus as being the Messiah. Remember, in Matthew 25 – Jesus has already triumphantly entered into Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday. This is just days before Jesus is arrested, tried, brutally beaten unmercifully and crucified. Jesus, being the Messiah, was at the forefront of those days ever since Jesus arrived in Jerusalem – and they were out to get Him. This highlights the fact that the parable isn't just about the very end of time, the great and terrible day for which the world and the church still wait.

Throughout His three-year ministry, Jesus was coming as Messiah to His people, the people of Israel. They were the ones who were invited to the wedding feast. The people are divided, in this parable, between the wise, who know Jesus and make sure they keep alert for His 'coming', and the foolish, who as Jesus illustrates will say in this parable "*Open the door for us!*" *"But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'*" (Matthew 25:11-12). Just as the Sermon on the Mount summarizes Jesus' challenge to the people of Israel, and to the whole world, He is challenging the world to be prepared and to not delay. What Jesus did was unique and decisive, changing forever the way the world is and how God relates to it, and that we need to be alert and be aware that the time is coming – and we cannot be tied up in excuses and hoping that our friends will help to provide for us, where we have fallen short – like the foolish bridesmaids expecting the five wise ones to fill the gap and lend them their 'oil'. Let's face it – it is easy to ignore the warning and to stop paying attention to God's work and its demands, and to be unprepared when the moment suddenly arrives. I want to suggest to you, today – right now - that each of us needs to have a 'care plan.'

Many of us have things that we need to do each and every morning before heading out into the world, right? It might be taking care of medications, some need to test their blood sugar, or their cholesterol, and recording the results – and maybe acting according to those results – maybe taking another medication. For some of us it is not optional – and there can be no excuses made for not doing these things – it is not when and if we feel like it. For others there is the need to prepare for the day in other ways – a certain kind of clothes, grooming, shaving, hair care, makeup, etc. You wouldn't think of heading out the door without taking care of these details, right? Once again, these things are not optional and there is no room for excuses – and it is not when and if we feel like it. It could be said that you take 'extreme ownership' of these things – and rightly so. We need to be prepared.

And now let's get down to the heart of what Jesus was talking about in today's Holy Gospel – your 'spiritual care plan.' In order for us to be spiritually healthy and to grow spiritually – each one of us needs to be reading Holy Scripture - daily! That doesn't mean that you need to read a chapter a day – but read your Bible – daily! Like with the examples that I just gave regarding the physical – this needs to be done for our own good – and not when and 'if' you feel like it. There should be no room for excuses – we need to be prepared.

Wait – there's more – we should be in church – every Sunday – in community with fellow believers, receiving the Word of God and His Spiritual Food – the Body and Blood of Christ – to enrich us and nourish us for the coming week – and to deal with the 'stuff' that will be coming at us in the days of each week. Once again – it should not be 'when we feel like it' making a list of excuses of where I should be instead. Each of us need to take extreme ownership of this – we need to be prepared!

None of us are faultless in our 'spiritual care plans' – but if the doctor were to tell you that you needed to do certain things to enjoy the rest of your life in a healthy and safe manner – and that it was 'non-negotiable' – what would your response be? Would it be – 'I want to get a

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second opinion?’ That can be a good thing – as I learned – but it shouldn’t be our original kneejerk reaction – when you know that you know that you need to be doing something. Or would it be ‘I don’t need that?’ Or would it be – ‘I have to admit – I need to do this, and I will need love and support to get it done – each and every day – and each and every Sunday?’

I want to suggest to you that Jesus has given each of us His diagnosis and His prescription to be prepared for each and every day and for the day that He comes again. My friends, there should be no room for excuses – we need to be prepared – for as Jesus said: "*because you do not know the day or the hour.*" (Matthew 25:13)