

Twenty-Third Sunday After Pentecost, November 8, 2020, Year A

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 25: 1-13

***"Be Ready!"***

Isn't it true that we live in a world today that is filled with warnings? Our cell phones can warn us about dozens of things. People have doorbells that can warn you when someone unexpected comes to your door, especially if you are not home – you can even respond to the and tell them 'what do you want!' There are weather radios that can alert you when storms come, and then phones today come already set to let you know when there is an Amber Alert – it will go wacko, especially at 2 in the morning when both of our phones go off – praying that it is not nearby.

I believe it is especially important for us to examine the roots of this parable from Jesus that are deep in Jewish tradition and that has forewarned thousands to be aware of the promise of the coming of the bridegroom. In Jewish background, when someone is betrothed – as Mary and Joseph were – when the time comes – the one who calls the shots on the wedding – is not the mother of the bride – it 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!'

According to Jesus, everybody has got 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 all 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 often referred to Himself as the Bridegroom. John the Baptist's followers came to Jesus saying, "*Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?*" (Matthew 9:14) And Jesus answered them, "*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 Anointed One, Messiah. Remember, here we are in Matthew 25 – Jesus had already, in Matthew 21, 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 the religious leaders 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 ministering to, taking care of His people, the people of Israel – as the Anointed One – the Messiah. The people of Israel 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 did not have the oil. They said, "*Open the door for us!*" "*But*

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*he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'* (Matthew 25:11-12). Jesus is challenging the world to be prepared and to not delay. What Jesus did was unique and decisive, forever changing the way the world is and how God relates to it, and so we need to be alert and be aware that the time is indeed coming. My dear friends, there is no time for excuses or hoping that we can rely on our friends to help to provide for us, where we have fallen short – like those five foolish bridesmaids who were expecting the five wise ones to fill the gap and lend them their ‘oil’. How easy it is to stop paying attention to God’s work and the demands needed, and to end up being totally unprepared when the time comes. Each one of us has to have a plan – to be ready.

Each and every morning – we have a routine that we need to do before heading out into the world, right? It might be taking needed meds, or to test their blood sugar, or their cholesterol, and recording the results – and because of those results – you might have to be taking another medication. For some of us it is not optional – and we cannot avoid not doing these things – it might be picking the right clothes, grooming, shaving, hair care, makeup, - you know the drill. Have you ever driven on a weekday morning, and you are stopped at a stoplight – and the person behind you is either shaving or putting on their makeup – getting the mascara just right – praying that the light doesn’t change – or if it does change – they do not care. They have to be ready - right? For many of us, these things are not optional and there is no room for excuses – and it is not when and if we feel like it. These are the ‘have to do’ things – and rightly so. We need to be prepared.

What Jesus was talking about in today’s Holy Gospel is preparing your ‘spiritual care plan.’ In order for us to be spiritually healthy and to spiritually grow – we need to be reading Holy Scripture – not just once in a while, but daily! That does not mean that you need to read a chapter a day – but read your Bible – daily! Some people have devotionals like ‘Jesus Calling’ which is based on Scripture and even has the Scripture for that reading for that day. That is getting in the Word – however you can do it. Get in the Word of God! Like the physical things I just spoke about – 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. Now that might make some people uncomfortable - but that is my job! To speak the truth – to tell you the hard things that we need to be ready for when the Messiah comes.

We should be in church – every Sunday – (I am preaching to the ‘choir’ – you are all here on Sunday – praise the Lord.) We need to be 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 so that we can deal with the ‘stuff’ that will be coming at us in the days of each week. I know there is the pandemic – but I see pictures of people at sporting events or out in restaurants – but they are not in church. Once again – it should not be ‘when we feel like it’. Each of us need to take extreme ownership of this – we need to be prepared! There are some – who have medical needs and meet me on the porch for Holy Communion – or I bring it to them as they ask me to. It just makes me wonder – again – it might make some people uncomfortable, but that is my job. I need to speak the truth -it is important.

There is not one of us who is faultless in our ‘spiritual care plans.’ Sometimes we make excuses – I am too busy, I have an appointment, and I have this and that. So, if you cannot do it first thing in the day – how many of us have cell phones? Do you know that there are Bibles that you can have as an app on your cell phone and you can read the Bible when you get a chance. It feeds you, it directs you, it nourishes you, it guides you, after all – it is God’s Word.

If the doctor tells you that you had to do things in order to live – and that it was ‘non-negotiable’ – what would your response be? Would it be – ‘I want to get a second opinion?’ While that can be a good thing it should not 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?’ It is time for a ‘check up from the neck up’ – for us to assess our spiritual lives. If that might make you uncomfortable, whether you are here in church, or on-line, that is my job.

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