

November 8, 2020

Matthew 25: 1-13

Rev. Larry Brown - Powell United Methodist Church

“Do We Have What We Need?”

Both of my folks graduated from The Ohio State University. A good portion of Buckeye blood courses through our veins. When I was just a kid we lived in a nearby north end suburb of Columbus. This was back in the 1960s and the times were turbulent. The VietNam war was raging and students on college campuses across the nation were regularly protesting. Hippie culture was strong back then, with long hair, bell bottoms, rock music and the peace sign. I was too young to grasp most of what was happening in the midst of that culture clash but I do have a fairly vivid memory of our family driving down High Street and through the OSU campus. My brother, sister, and I would be in the back seat of our station wagon and my folks would say, “Kids, roll up your windows (yes, we had handles that had to be cranked to roll up the window), lock your doors. We want to stay safe as we drive by campus.” I’m sure we weren’t in any real danger but, like I say, things were a bit volatile. I remember feeling fascinated as I watched the students walk along the street or cross from one side to the other in front of us. It felt like we were in a whole other world. I have the memory of a corner where a crowd of students gathered around a man who stood on a short concrete wall. He was gesturing wildly and preaching. I say preaching because it was clear he held a bible in his hands. There was a painted sign around his neck that read, “The end is near. Are you ready?” We were just driving by but we were going slow enough and were close enough to see the reaction of those who were listening to him. Some were serious, nodding in agreement. Others were smiling or laughing, probably because the man was comical in a way. But I don’t think he intended to be a joke. The man was on fire with passion and he was as serious as he could be. He believed the end was near. He wanted everyone within the sound of his voice to be on the right side of judgement when that final day arrived.

I’ve since learned that there are Christians who are fascinated and focused on when the end will come and what will happen on that day. Like that street preacher from decades ago, there is a lot of fear wrapped into that message and the idea is to scare us into getting right with God. Quite frankly, the parable from Jesus we’ve heard today is often understood like that. There are 10 bridesmaids waiting for the coming of the bridegroom. Five of them wisely have oil for their lamps as they wait through the night and 5 do not. The story seems to suggest that we need to be ready because we never know when Christ will come, and we don’t want to miss that moment or be on the outside looking in when God brings everything to its final conclusion. To think about it can easily make us worry about the status of our own souls. But I’m here to say that increasing our fear or amping up our anxiety is never what Jesus intends. This is the same Jesus who repeatedly told the disciples, “Do not fear.” From the beginning of his mission at the River Jordan to his last breath on the cross, Jesus doesn’t frighten us into a relationship with God but invites us to become participants with God. Let us not forget that God’s kingdom is infused with a redeeming and grace-filled love. Jesus doesn’t want us to miss that, not because we should fear what God will but to be sure we will be part of what God is doing. Jesus is much more interested in this present time than he is in the end of time. Are we ready to take our place in what God is doing? Are we ready to say “yes” to Christ and to open our lives to the fullness of God’s blessing, which emerges now and every day?

Have you ever had the experience where you say to yourself or to someone else, “Well, that was a God moment?” Maybe you were in the right place at the right time, and it wasn’t because you planned well or made the right decision but it just happened and you knew God had to be involved. God moments often feel like a surprise to us and maybe that’s the point of the story. Jesus doesn’t want us to be surprised. God is always working in our lives. The hope Jesus has is that we would string together all kinds of God moments, and with such consistency that it’s not random or lucky but the result of being ready to respond to God intentionally and with faithfulness. We’ve repeatedly made the point in our worship experiences these past months how important it is to be connected and engaged as the church. I know you are aware of the many opportunities we have, both online and otherwise, to intentionally make our relationship with God a priority in these challenging times. Children’s Sunday School is online. Youth and adult virtual bible studies keep us grounded in the Word, and while our mission projects are happening differently than before, our giving to those in need is just as strong as ever. God isn’t shut down and Christ is just as alive now as before. What is necessary, then, is our intentional decision to do what we can to position our lives to enable us to participate in what God is doing. We’re not perfect. We get distracted. There’s much that challenges our fortitude and our hope, but Jesus does not back away from reminding us to be ready to respond to God whenever the moment comes. Don’t be afraid, just be ready, and the best way to do that is to expect God to show up no matter who we are with and no matter what we are doing no matter where we are.

Everyone in the church is receiving a daily email called “Moments of Beauty.” Have you seen these? If not, I invite you to look for these in your Inbox. They are brief moments of reflection on a selected image but they invite us to more than just a moment. The whole point is to open our hearts to looking for God and then to respond to God throughout the day. I’ve got an invitation for you. What if your moments with God because minutes with God and

those minutes became an hour with God and the hours became a day with God and your days became a life with God? Most of us are pretty good at compartmentalizing life. Family is here, work is there. I do worship now and then I move on to the next activity, and our commitments flow in whatever sequence is scheduled for the day. Faith is more than an agenda item. We know this. So, Jesus' invitation to put oil in our lamps isn't frightening. It makes sense. We want to be ready for what God is doing in us and in our world.

With the variety of electronic devices I depend on in my life, I increasingly rely upon notifications to remind me what's coming and what I must do. I think God constantly notifies us that now is the time to respond in faith. Are you connecting with those you love in some way today? God is notifying you that the door is open to experience God's love in that. Do you have work to do, places to go, decisions to make today? God is notifying you that your faith matters in how you use your time or apply your energy. Do you have a prayer that you've been hesitant to pray? God is notifying you that now is the time. Jesus said, "be ready," and he also said, "ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be open." (Matthew 7:7) This is the moment, the time to live with God. It is now and forever. Amen.