

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, November 6–12 (A) – Matthew 25:1-13

The Challenge of Discipleship: *Readiness*

Focus Question: *How do we get ready for an event at an unknown time and place?*

word of life

“Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” Matthew 25:13
(NRSV)

Read Matthew 25:1-13

The parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids is found only in Matthew’s Gospel. The parable is placed in the middle of Jesus’ teaching about the end times (24:1 -- 25:46). Jesus is speaking to his disciples while sitting on the Mount of Olives, looking at the Temple grounds (24:1-3). He has left the temple and the verbal battle with the scribes and Pharisees. The disciples come to Jesus privately (24:3) to ask Jesus about the signs of the end of the age. Jesus uses several analogies to stress the need to live faithfully and expectantly, to watch and remain ready.

The image in this week’s parable of the bridegroom is found in both the Old and New Testaments to describe the covenantal relationship between God and God’s people. (See Hosea 2:14-23; Isaiah 62:5; Revelation 22:17). A typical ritual at a wedding would have the bridegroom coming with his companions to the house of the bride’s parents to take her to his own home. As the groom approaches, the bridesmaids would come out with lighted lamps and meet him.

1. *How do you picture that scene?*
2. *How helpful or meaningful is the image of bride and bridegroom to describe the relationship between God and people? Explain your answer.*

Note the opening verse of the parable: “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this.” The word “then” and the tense of the verb imply something that will happen in the future. Contrast this with other “kingdom” parables in Matthew (Matthew 13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47) which begin in the present: “The kingdom of heaven is like. . . .” While the parables in Matthew 13 emphasize the mystery of the kingdom already present in the world, the future tense of the parable of the bridesmaids points to a time when the presence of the kingdom will be clearly seen and understood.

The parable begins with grace. At first, all ten bridesmaids, wise or foolish, are equal members of the wedding party. All are to be included in the celebration. Both the foolish and the wise are prepared for the ordinary, usual events. But as in other parables in Matthew, grace calls for a “wise” response.

3. *What message of grace and challenge is in the parable?*

The challenging question for the church of Matthew’s day (and for the church today) is: How are we to live during the “in-between” time – the time between the inbreaking of the kingdom of heaven in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the promised coming of the victorious Christ at the end of the age? Do we trust in One whose presence is not readily seen? The answer Jesus speaks in Matthew’s Gospel is to live a life of active faithfulness, of *doing* what we *believe*.

4. *What are the characteristics of a faithful disciple who waits and prepares for Christ’s coming?*
5. *What does it mean to live a life of active faithfulness?*

word *among us*

As I was growing up, I couldn't wait for Christmas. It's not that I was eager for the gifts under the tree. No, I longed for Christmas because of a promise of the star – not the one *over* Bethlehem, but rather the promise to be the star *of* Bethlehem. For the budding thespians of the Sunday school, *the* coveted role to have in the Christmas play was to be Mary or Joseph.

True, the roles didn't have any lines to memorize. But a truly gifted actor is able to embody the message through a gesture of a hand, an empathetic glance, a posture expressing love and adoration. And I had the part down pat.

The year finally arrived for my light to shine as Joseph. This was also the year the director was expecting her first child. Her first-born arrived three weeks before Christmas; and the birth inspired her to announce that the baby in the Christmas pageant that year would be a living, breathing infant.

The weeks prior to Christmas were spent in preparation. As the shepherds arrived on stage after their fear-filled encounter with the heavenly host, I was to gently pick up the child, cradle her in my arms with fatherly compassion, and hold her as the shepherds worshipped and adored.

Rehearsals went smoothly; the baby was adorable, a helpful supporting cast member for my acting debut. But the night of the performance was a different story. As I picked up the child, she began to cry. I tried rocking her back and forth as I had seen the director do, but the cries only increased. How could I emote love and compassion holding a screaming baby? The child was stealing my moment to shine! Finally, in desperation, I gave the baby to Mary, who wrapped the blanket (which I had forgotten to pick up with the child) around the cold infant; and of course, the crying stopped.

Afterwards, I was glum and disappointed. My big moment had been upstaged by a crying baby. But many said that they experienced Christ's coming in a new and meaningful way through that shivering, crying child.

Christ came that night. I was ready, but I wasn't prepared. I knew the part, but I had forgotten the most important role. I was so busy with my own aspirations that I failed to see the precious gift represented in my arms.

1. *How do you face the challenge of waiting for Christ?*
2. *What distracts you from your waiting?*
3. *How do you prepare as you wait for Christ?*
4. *How do you face the challenge of being ready for Christ to return?*

Prayer

Christ, calm our impatient hearts as we wait for your return.

Dig Deeper

Revelation 22:17

last word

This week, be still and wait upon the Lord,
listening, being ready to hear.



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