



# “Daily Preparedness”

Text: Matthew 25:1-13

*a sermon by Jerusha Van Camp*

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

Today’s Gospel parable is one that I have read and heard read many times, and it continues to offer relevance to our place in this time, as global citizens, as citizens of this nation, and as citizens of this community. It holds wisdom to help guide our faith and our actions.

First, let’s look at what each element of this story represents. The bridegroom is given as a figure to represent God. The wedding, itself, represents God’s good world of peace, and freedom, where everyone has enough. The young women represent God’s people. The oil lamps are symbolic of our faith and our commitment to God. And the oil that fuels the lamps represents our readiness and preparedness. I think it is important to note that everyone in this story wants to attend the wedding. The people have shown up, they are where they are supposed to be. They have also come prepared with their lamps to light the way.

In this parable, we are the wise and foolish women holding our lamps and waiting for God’s good world to come. And like the lateness of the bridegroom, so the wait for God’s good world is unexpectedly long. Some are running out of oil, some out of faithfulness, and some out of hope. God’s reign is taking a very long time to put this this war-torn, horror-stricken, oppressed, life of scarcity in submission to God’s better world.

When will that day come? When will this broken world be restored and resurrected from its death bed? While I would like to equate myself to the wise young women in this parable who were prepared for a lengthy wait, but in truth, if this were real life, there would have to be a third category for those who wandered off out of boredom, and that's where I would be. I do not like waiting. Even the Apostles thought that day of God's good kingdom was near, and 2,000 years later, we are still waiting for that day.

Many Christianities are guilty of perpetuating some very misguided and downright heretical end time theology. While I do understand the appeal of believing in a quick escape for the righteous out of this mess we have created, the Gospel asks for more of us than just looking for a quick fix. The longer I live, the more I understand that this life of faith is less of a journey towards a magical hope in the beyond, and is actually a journey of opening the eyes of our hearts to see God in the gritty, sticky reality that is human life.

The 13<sup>th</sup> century poet, Rumi, wrote, "You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the ocean in a drop." Celtic Christian theologian, John Philip Newel, echoes this belief of life-giving inner human depth by writing that "even in our mother's womb, God placed "wisdom" inside of us. The wisdom Newel is referring to is the voice of God in the deepest part of our inner world. It is that part of our soul that has always known God. It is the same inner knowing that children reveal in their brutal honesty. It is something that as we "grow up" often gets buried by suffering, disappointments, and cynicism and we forget the childlike simplicity of God and our ears become deafened to still the small voice of God in our hearts.

Richard Rohr says, "You can tell a lot about someone by what they do with their pain - do they transform it, or do they transmit it? We feel the pain of the world, and we feel it deeply. We see the reports of more than 4,000 dead Palestinian children. We hear the anguish of the families of the 242 hostages in Gaza and of those who were massacred in Israel on October 7. We see the suffering of the unhoused and those who do not have enough to eat. We feel anger and frustration at the corruption of governments, who line their pockets and secure their power while the people they are supposed to represent suffer and are diminished. We feel our own pain, and our own private suffering and losses. Sometimes that grief feels insurmountable.

But within us, there is this inner ocean, this wisdom that God has placed within us that gives us a great capacity to hold love and compassion for others even in the darkest of times. It is an act of defiance, when we rebel against the despair of the world and allow our pain to be transformed into oceans of compassion.

Compassion is critical. Without it we can only think of ourselves and of our own self-preservation, but what good is compassion without action? Mother Teresa said that, "prayer in action is love, and love in action is service. Try to give unconditionally whatever a person needs in the moment. The point is to do something, however small, and show you care through your actions by giving your time ... Do not worry about why problems exist in the world - just respond to people's needs." The ocean of compassion that flows deep within us is not for us alone, but it is there for us to release into the world.

From our own confession in the *Brief Statement of Faith* we profess that we are "empowered by the Holy Spirit, to have courage, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom and peace." Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we have been given the ability to act compassionately and live out our faith daily, prepared to offer our lives in service to God in the world each and every day.

The moral of our parable today is to tell us to let our light shine, but to also work to build a hopeful future no matter how daunting the task or how long the wait. God is not calling us to predict the end of the world or plot an escape route out of the suffering. God is calling us to be present in the here and now, doing what we can for the good of all.

Our faith leads us to the deepest places of our inner world where we can discern God's deep wisdom and hear God's voice. What really matters is that our lives are guided by the wisdom of God, and that God's transformative life in us is made known and shown in our daily lives, as we embody compassion and God's love to the world.

Being the wise young woman is to keep our light burning and our lamps filled with oil. It is an action of being prepared daily to respond to the poor and disenfranchised, to fight for justice and equity, and to do what we can to shape this world to be like God's joyful and just purpose for human life.

This is the faithfulness that Jesus modeled for us. To know that like Jesus, we too are filled with God's spirit, we too are empowered to love, and that ocean of love we possess washes over the world in compassionate action that keeps the light burning no matter how long it takes for God's good world to come. Daily preparedness is to be faithful in dedicated service to God's will in this world, and as children of God, we are to be ready, willing, and prepared to act with compassion right here and right now. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Mother of us all, Amen.

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