

Gospel reflections

Matthew 25:1-13

25 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids^[a] took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹ Later the other bridesmaids^[a] came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹² But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

What are you like at waiting?

Waiting in a queue for a ticket or entry to an event...

Waiting for that teenager to arrive home late at night...

Waiting for an election result...

Waiting to hug a family member from whom you have been separated during COVID restrictions...

I am terrible at waiting. I cannot tolerate queues and have had way too many hours waiting for results in doctors' and hospital rooms for one lifetime. Yet Matthew's reading, while seeming a little harsh, has had me thinking about waiting in a year that has really challenged our understanding and experience of waiting.

The theme of waiting is echoed in all the readings for this week and in Psalm 70, we read...

...come quickly to me, O God.

You are my help and my deliverer;

Lord, do not delay.

These words of desperate waiting, seem like the kinds of words that the disciples may have uttered as they sat with Jesus and listened to the parable of the ten bridesmaids -- “How long will we have to wait, Jesus?” They also seem like the words of the first Christian communities, the audience of Matthew's gospel (possibly the Thessalonians, the epistle reading), as they witnessed their loved ones dying and waited desperately for Jesus' return. “When are you coming back, Jesus? How much longer must we wait!”

We associate many emotions with waiting such as anticipation, wonder, eagerness, dread, agitation, fear, longing, loss. Our time of waiting will be experienced differently depending on why we are waiting and what we expect might happen. Waiting is hard. Perhaps this parable is about a different kind of waiting altogether. I don't know about you, but I don't feel like I am actively waiting for the return of the Jesus, or at least, not most days. So, how can we take some meaning or translate this story into our lives.

Karoline Lewis suggests that these readings might remind us that *what* we are all waiting for is for God to show up *in our* waiting. This does not mean that our waiting will be made any easier but rather what we say or how we choose to be in the waiting can have an impact on us and others. When we call on God in our waiting, we share our need and at the same time live the promise that God is with us always. Because of Jesus, there is no present or waiting where God is not with us.

Yes, we still want the wait to be over. However, it is perhaps especially in the times of uncertainty, anxiety and waiting that, as leaders, we can remind ourselves and communities of God's promises. Just as the epistle writers did with the early Christian communities, we encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18) and trust that God is with us in our waiting.

God will show up to be what we need God to be depending on how we experience the waiting. If our waiting is experienced in fear? God comes with peace. If our waiting is experienced in longing? God arrives with deep and abiding satisfaction. If our waiting is experienced in anticipation? God accompanies us in the joy that should be our present. In the words of Matthew, yes, keep alert. But rather than keep alert for what is to come, keep alert for the ways in which God enters into our present attempts at alertness -- and seems to bring exactly what we need. To keep awake does not mean the absence of God. It means to recognize our absolute dependence on the presence of God. Karoline Lewis

Prayer: Waiting and Watching

You call me to wait on You, Lord,
but I get tired of waiting.
Your answers to my prayers,
Your call for me to serve You,
the promise of Your coming Kingdom,
they all seem to take so long.

You tell me to watch for Your coming, Lord,
but I'm not sure how to prepare for...
a thief in the night,
an undisclosed time,
and Your disconcerting habit of secrecy and mystery.

Yet, something inside whispers
that You're not all that hard to find;
That You're *always* coming to me,
and that both the waiting and the watching,
are more about being open to You now,
than about trying not to be surprised in the future.

And so I will keep waiting,
and I'll try to stay alert,
so that I can catch the glimpses of Your glory
that fill my day, every day. Amen.

~ written by John van de Laar, on Sacredise.com.

Blessings for your day,

Anne

Song: [Terrain God with us](#)

Additional thoughts:

Chapters 23-25 are Jesus' final discourse (lengthy speech or teaching) in this Gospel. Jesus began his public ministry in this Gospel with a lengthy discourse that we call the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7), and he closes it with this lengthy discourse that is sometimes called the Judgment Discourse (chapters 23-25). Chapter 26 moves into preparations for Jesus' crucifixion.

It is the first of a series of four parables, the other three of which we will deal with on this and the next two Sundays, the last three Sundays of this liturgical year. The other three parables are:

- The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids (25:1-13)—this Sunday—emphasizing the importance of being prepared for Christ's coming.
- The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)—next Sunday—emphasizing the importance of being found by Christ at his coming to have been faithful over that with which he has entrusted us.
- The Judgment of the Nations (25:31-46)—not a parable really, but an apocalyptic vision of the last judgment—the last Sunday of this liturgical year—emphasizing the importance of being found by Christ, at his coming, to have been generous to “the least of these my brothers” (25:40).

In the first and second parables, the master is delayed (24:48; 25:5). In the third parable, the master returns “after a long time” (25:19). These parables reflect the fact that Matthew's church, late in the first century, is dealing with an unexpected delay in the Parousia (Second Coming). They expected Jesus to come by now, and these parables tell them that it is important to stay ready for the master's coming.