

Wedding Day Blues
 Matthew 25:1-13
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It was their wedding day, a day to celebrate from morning to night in the small Middle Eastern Village. A wedding feast was a village event! Shops were closed. Even the Rabbi gave the students a day off from their lessons. The newlyweds made their way down the dusty streets in the village. As was custom, they stopped at each home, where gifts were given and best wishes extended. No one was to be left out. Eventually they would end up at their home for the final event of the celebration – a huge banquet. Everyone was happy. No doubt a bit of wine had been shared along the way. The sun was setting, but darkness, now posed its own set of difficulties. Since the Romans had occupied the village, a new law was enforced – no one could roam the streets after dark with out a lamp. In many ways it was a helpful law - the lamps were oiled soaked rags on poles so they illuminated the road hazards. But safety wasn't the reason for the law. The reason was that the occupying Romans wanted to be sure that they could watch any gathering of people – to make sure that they weren't insurrections plotting against the occupiers. Tonight the gathering was, indeed, a wedding party rejoicing in all the joyful traditions of the culture. Friends carried the lamps for the bride and groom. It was the job of the bridesmaids to keep the lamps burning outside of the home where the procession would conclude. It was getting late – past midnight but sounds of merriment filled the air as the merry-makers approached the home. The procession rounded the corner and to their surprise there was only partial light. Where were the other bridesmaids? What? They had run out of oil and left to shop for more! Why did they leave? They knew the bridegroom and his party would soon be there. Why would they risk missing the party? But, sadly, miss the party is exactly what they did - gates had to be closed, the doors had to be shut – the political climate of the day was way to dangerous to wait for them to return – for that matter to even acknowledge them at all if they knocked. The five foolish bridesmaids were simply out of luck and out of the party – the wedding day blues for sure.

This parable, like all of Jesus' parables was sliced from daily life. This particular parable was in response to the futuristic questions of his disciples: When will you come again, Jesus and what will be the signs of the end of age? I am certain that Matthew found himself facing his own congregation asking these same questions. It is probably why he included the parable in his gospel When will Jesus return and what will be the signs of the end of the age? Early Christians believed that Jesus would return in their life time – and here we are more than 2000 years latter asking the same questions. When will Jesus return and what will be the signs of the end of the age?

There are people who pore over the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation attempting to break the code to answer these questions. I must admit there are some pretty elaborate solutions. In our country, folks have seized the commercial advantages of these

questions with the popularity of books and movies such as the “Left Behind” series. And of course, we see finger pointing after every hurricane, earthquake and flood. It seems to me, however, that Jesus continually guides us away from the how questions concerning the “end of age” quest with answers to the “living now” quest. Jesus’ “end of age” parables have a wonderful twist to them – they point to today with the implication that if we faithfully live each day, the “end-of-age” issues will take care of themselves. So, what does this parable tell us about faithful living each day?

At first the story may seem a little strange for we approach it from our own wedding experiences. For example, last spring I officiated at a wedding in Oregon. At the rehearsal, the wedding coordinator, a very organized woman, presented me with a minute by minute schedule of the next twenty-four hours – frankly just looking at the paper exhausted me and made me want to go back to my hotel to take a nap. Let me assure you, sitting around waiting for the bridegroom, like the bridal party in the Jesus’ parable, was not part of this woman’s plan – in fact, sitting around waiting for anyone was not on her extensive agenda. Actually, the bridegroom was my second cousin. I have known him well since his birth and as I read the scheduled, I suspected that sitting around waiting for the bridegroom might be exactly what we WOULD doing during the next 24 hours. I knew he would show up for every event, but I also knew he would be late. Thanks to the capable wedding coordinator, events rolled along well. Efficiency and timeliness, however, were not part of the wedding customs of Jesus world. A wedding was celebrated all day and at a leisurely pace that had no predictions - except that it would end at the couple’s new home for a feast. Now for the Oregon wedding-coordinator that would be the definition of the “**Wedding Day Blues.**” and truthfully – probably mine also.

In the parable we find the ten bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom and the wedding party. Five, defined as foolish, did not pack extra oil for their lamps and thus had to run to the store - five, defined as wise, were well prepared with extra oil.

So I ask myself, like I often do with the biblical stories, who do I identify with in this story - well, let’s see, of the six GPC Jamaican work projects only two people have had a last minute “Where’s my passport?” issue – you guessed it – I was one of them. Yes, I can easily identify with the unprepared bridesmaids. It is an easy leap to see myself in a panic digging through my backpack for the extra flask of oil. “I know I have it here. I’m sure I packed it. It’s in one of these pockets!” as I madly unzip one pocket after the next. And then speed to Wegman’s..... because it’s open all night - snatch the first employee I see..... because it’s quicker to ask where the oil is than roam the aisles - grab the oil off of the shelf..... because time is running out and tap my toe at the cash register..... because my stomach is churning. ONLY to have missed the entire event upon returning. I’m in this parable.

The five foolish bridesmaids simply weren’t around when the bridal party showed up for the feast. Interesting choice they made, don’t you think? If they had stayed, rather than running to buy more oil, I am certain, the bridegroom would have let them into the party. So why were they really “foolish?” Perhaps they were foolish, because they didn’t have

their priorities right! Had they simply been at the door with all their inadequacies, they would have been invited to the feast.

This parable begs us to ask the question What are our priorities and do we make choices that reflect them. If we, like biblical scholars assume that the bridegroom of Jesus' parable was himself, then we must ask ourselvesAre we present for the Divine events of our lives? Do we miss the spiritual "ahas" around us? Are we running here and there so fast that we don't slow down long enough to reflect upon our experiences of the Divine. In this very chapter, Jesus tells the disciples, I was hungry and you gave me food, just as you did to the least of these you did it to me. " Do we seize opportunities to be present to Christ by being present to those in need or do we get hooked by the task of the moment and put it off until another time – another day?

This fall we have had many opportunities to be present with Christ. From responding to the victims of Hurricane Katrina, to biking down the Erie Canal for mission, to working on the Ham Dinner for stewardship, to donating to the Presbyterian Peacemaking Offering for justice, to dumping coins into the Coin-off for Cameron, to donating food for, cooking, and serving lunch at St. Joseph's and so much more. We have even enjoyed some of the banquets – the pig roast, the Reformation pot luck, the picnic in Perinton park – and most important the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Let us rejoice that God has called us to this place at this time where together we can encourage each other, help each other discern God's will, and celebrate the very presence of Jesus Christ. Christian community is about together seeking ways to deepen our relationship with Christ. It is about together being intentionally present to that sacred relationshiptoday and tomorrow and forever – to the end of the age and beyond.

Amen