

Sermon Notes, Nov 12, 2017

Scripture: Matthew 25:1-13

All Readings this Sunday http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp27_RCL.html

I want to start with the punchline from the parable of ten bridesmaids. Jesus says, "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

These reminders have a particular appeal to me. I tend to work and play like my hair is on fire. However, obsessiveness is **not** being awake. I am thankful to hear Jesus calling me back from the brink into true wakefulness. This particular parable brought up an old memory (before grey hair) – Zen Meditation. I did lots of Zen meditation when I was younger. The picture to right is a "han". The han is the board that a "fukudo" will strike with a mallet to call mediators back to the zendo (meditation hall) during a retreat. As the time for meditation grows near - the fukudo strikes the wood with more and more insistence that the participants wrap up what they are doing and come to meditation.



During my four year love affair with Zen, I sat many sessions - week long meditation retreats. I took great delight in being the fukudo. On my first retreat, I was appointed the fukudo – and I should not have been. I whacked the han with such force that I ended up cracking the mallet handle. I was literally hammering people back to the meditation hall. Luckily, the leader was not easily frustrated. She in zen fashion quietly asked me to be a little less enthusiastic next time. I don't do Zen meditation like I used to, but the words on written on the face of the han have stuck with me over the years. "Wake up, Life is transient....Don't waste time." Jesus' urgency for his friends to wake up is the focus of the parable of the bridesmaids.

Ten Bridesmaids in context

Matthew 24 and 25 are concerned with final judgement. The parables in these chapters strike two notes – be prepared, stay awake.

Matthew Chapter 24

1-29 It's all going to fall apart, everything is awful, until....

30-31.1 The cavalry, God, shows up.

Until the Calvary shows up- be prepared and awake, but we get lazy, impatient, and judgmental as seen these stories:

32-34 The fig tree – Its leaves came out too early – Therefore, don't jump the gun.

36-44 The workers in the field – they did not pay attention, and some missed the bandwagon. Therefore, be ready at any moment.

45-50 The servants left in charge – They got too cocky and started throwing their lazy, drunk weight around until the boss shows up. Therefore, watch for the unexpected.

Matthew Chapter 25

1-13 The foolish bridesmaids weren't prepared – stay prepared – even if you fall asleep.

14-30 The bags of gold (the parable of the talents) – Some ventured out and did well. One hid in fear – Don't mistake delay for a lack of accountability. **This will be next week's Gospel reading, Nov 19.**

31-46 Sheep and goats – don't judge others by placing them in worthy/ unworthy categories – unless you want to be sorted the same way **This is the Gospel reading in two weeks, Nov 26.**

The context of Chapters 24 & 25 doesn't necessarily soften the message. Preparation and wakefulness in Matthew 25:1-13 is still the point. There is some scary imagery in these chapters. The primary goal of the stories is not to scare the hell out of people. It is a challenge for us to step up and examine our lives, make and account, and shore up what is lacking. The call to stay awake is even more pressing if you take all the "hell fire and damnation" static **out** of the chapters, in order to hear Jesus clearly telling you to check your 'spiritual earthquake kit.' **These texts are supposed to make us uncomfortable! We need the Holy Spirit's help in trying them on for size.**

I leave you with a final thought written by Greg Carey, Professor of New Testament at Lancaster Theological Seminary, Lancaster, PA. He writes about the parable of the bridesmaids –

The parable of the virgins isn't necessarily arbitrary, but it is challenging. It calls Jesus' disciples to a state of constant alertness, of perpetual openness to God's dramatic future. We all know a few people, just a few, who tend to live that way.... But here we're not talking about a generic carpe diem approach to life. We're talking about living with a keen awareness of Jesus' return, an alertness tempered by preparation for a long haul.

Be prepared, stay awake, love the life you have been given.

Todd