

November 9, 2014

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

"Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

Firstly some information for today's parable story and the context in which it was written.....

Most scholars believe the Gospel of Matthew was composed by an anonymous, albeit inspired writer between 80 and 90 AD, some 50 years after Jesus' death as a human being..

The writer was probably a highly educated Jew, intimately familiar with the technical aspects of Jewish law, and the disciple Matthew was probably honored within his social circle.

According to the majority of modern scholars, the author drew on three main sources to compose his gospel. First, the Gospel of Mark; secondly the hypothetical collection of sayings known as the Q source; and material unique to his own community, called "Special Matthew", or the M source

I think it is important for us to understand that Jesus' teachings as related to us in the Holy Gospels were written from sources that understood the culture and customs in place during that time. Also what we read links back to the very words of God as presented to us through His son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Weddings never go out of style. They are usually old fashioned enough to make our grandparents proud, and as modern as today's news items.

There is always something fresh and beautiful about each wedding for we never seem to get over the excitement of watching two lives become one. At most weddings a lot of fuss is made over the bride and groom, but no one pays much attention to the attendants.

Not so with Jesus. He chooses to use a wedding scene as a parable, to illustrate further what he means by the command, "Watch!" He doesn't even mention the bride and only incidentally the bridegroom. His attention is focused on ten young ladies who were invited to the marriage.

The background to the parable is an eastern wedding in which the bridegroom, rather than the bride, is the center of attention. To this day, in Oriental weddings it is customary for the bridegroom to bear all the expense of the wedding (which

seems a bit fairer than our system where the poor father of the bride has to foot the bill for giving up his daughter to another man!) .

Weddings were always held at night and it was customary for the bridegroom to go to the house of the bride and take her to the wedding. As they walked through the streets they would be joined by guests at various places along the route. Our Lord's story of the ten maidens is the story of such a group, waiting for the bridegroom.

The parable we heard today, was intended for those who live in the intervening time of one generation between our Lord's first coming and his predicted second coming.

What is exactly meant by "the second coming"

Most English versions of the Nicene Creed including our own that we recite together every Sunday, include the following statements: "...he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. ... We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come."

So What is exactly meant by "the second coming"

One source I referenced simply provides a statement that the second coming of Jesus Christ is the hope of believers that God is in control of all things, and is faithful to the promises and prophecies in His Word.

Another source stated "the Second Coming", sometimes called the second advent of Christ or the *parousia*, is the anticipated return of Jesus to Earth. The belief is based on prophecies found in the canonical gospels and is part of most Christian eschatologies. The coming is predicted in biblical messianic prophecies

A third source provided both the dramatic and cataclysmic definition. The Second Coming of the Lord will be the terminal event of earth's history. Every rational individual should prepare of this phenomenal occasion—one of either thrilling reward, or indescribable terror, depending upon one's spiritual status.

And then I came upon this statement : **Views about the nature of Jesus' Second Coming vary among Christian denominations and among individual Christians.**

Aha.....now we are getting somewhere...and to hazard a guess, many of us in this place have many different personal responses to what is meant by the second coming.

I have my own perspective..... that Christ's second coming was that it took place at the time when God provided us with the Holy Spirit, the Great Advocate, who lives with us in our hearts and is available at any time.

It follows, then, that if God is available to us at all times, what relevance does waiting and preparation have in our lives?

I believe that waiting and preparation is about behaving in a responsible way as Christians throughout our lives.

Jesus is the bridegroom, we are the attendants...described in different Bible translations as bridesmaids, young ladies or virgins, you take your pick.....I think I prefer to be a bridesmaid.

Having our lamps trimmed and having the right quantity of oil available is to design and maintain our lives in accordance with the fundamental laws for a Christian life that Jesus laid down for us.

As Father Tom described last week...our attitude to our Christian way of life is critical in this...also the Laws mentioned two weeks ago, Loving the Lord our God and loving our neighbor as ourselves are the key ingredients to a good life, but we have to fill in the details.

Waiting denotes, for me, that our lives can end at any point in time....we are commanded by our Lord to wait with our good works current and in good order..

That means no loose ends, no procrastinating on issues we know need attention; no lingering hatred or resentment of others. No anger, or intolerance of others that bites at us , but we have been unable to forgive others or seek forgiveness for ourselves.

No off the cuff, snide comments or badmouthing of others that always reflects so badly on ourselves as the perpetrator of the comments.

No laziness in how we take care of others and ourselves. No lack of generosity to our Christian community and individuals within the community, whether it be through pledges, commitments of time and talent.

Failing to correct misinformation or misdirection that we have provided to others who have received it in good faith.

No taking out our frustrations and personal hurts on others, no matter how much better that makes us feel at the moment. We all have experience how being unkind toward others always backfires on us.

No self righteousness or sitting in judgment of others...we all do it at some time or other.

No excusing our misbehavior by saying "well...we are only human"....I believe this will be UNACCEPTABLE to the Bridegroom.

Keeping to the rules of human society or if we don't..... accepting and learning from the consequences.

Understanding that in all the potholes and misfortunes that life will inevitably beset us, that there is always a positive learning experience that is deep in there somewhere....however hard it is to find.

Praying to our Lord in moments of personal doubt, but bottom line keeping to the script, ...let us call it "The Christian Screen Play".

Let us pray.....

Dear Lord Jesus , so many of us burn the light of our lives on the shallow reservoir of oil while knowing your will has to be done.

How many of us, Lord, are waiting for you without attending to the important matters of our Christian Screen Play. Save us from this folly and please help us to be better Christians

Bring us into that wonderful experience of finding a flame that can never be put out, so that when we meet you, the Bridegroom, you will be truly proud of us.

In your Blessed name dear Jesus, Amen.