The Wait

Proper 27A
Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25
Psalm 78:1-7
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25:1-13

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Norman, OK
November 8, 2026

Waiting is a natural part of life. The things for which we wait might be good or not so good. We wait for the birth of a child. In hospital rooms we wait for news of loved ones. Kids wait years to grow tall enough to ride the giant roller coasters. When we call customer service we wait on hold, "Your call is important to us. Please remain on the line for the next available representative." Hours of waiting and they still haven't come on the line.

Our Gospel reading today could be entitled "The Wait" because that is exactly what the bridesmaids end up doing. They showed up at the appointed time, but the bridegroom was delayed. If this happened in our time, they would receive a text notification, "Please remain vigilant. The bridegroom will arrive shortly." Hours pass. They all fell asleep. When the bridegroom finally arrives, half of the bridesmaids find themselves doing some last-minute scrambling. But it was too little, too late. Even though they had accepted the invitation, they failed to perform their obligation and were shut out of the party.

This parable is one in a series that relate to Christ's return and the final judgement. At the time Matthew's Gospel was written, Christ's followers had been waiting a few decades for his return. They struggled with the wait, perhaps even wondering if they had missed it. Over two thousand years later we are still waiting.

Since Christ's ascension, there have been at least three hundred specific dates touted as the time of Christ's second coming. Obviously they were all wrong. But predications of his second coming continue to be made. We want to know when the waiting will end. God's time though isn't the same as our time. The rigid units of time- hours, years, centuries- are human constructs attempting to organize life. Bottom line- we don't know when Christ our bridegroom will arrive. So, we wait.

Waiting, Jesus tells us, is what the kingdom of heaven <u>will be like</u> until he comes again. Notice that he doesn't say, "<u>is</u> like" or "may be compared to." He says, "will be." This is definitive. At

some future time, he will come again. In other words, hurry up and wait my friends, for the time of his return is TBD- to be determined. Pass your time of waiting wisely.

In the parable there are two groups of bridesmaids. One is foolish and the other is wise. This has nothing to do with their intelligence level. It has everything to do with our covenant with God that we make at our baptism. The foolish, in their arrogance, think they are fulfilling their obligations to God. In reality they are following their own agenda and bend the truth to fit their own desires. Wisdom lies in fulfilling the obligations of our covenant- to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. As followers of Christ, we are called to live every day like Christ is returning today.

But waiting is hard. We don't like the uncertainty of it. People, particularly in our culture, can be impatient. We want things NOW. We have a fast-food mentality about almost everything in our lives. Patience has become a lost art. We struggle to be content with being present in the moment as we wait. It is hard to sit still or to rest in silence as we wait. Doing so seems to create anxiety as we think about all the things we could be doing instead.

We are driven to do, to accomplish. Our attention spans are short, minuscule it seems. In our rush, we become frustrated or perhaps angry, viewing a time of waiting as a roadblock rather than an opportunity. The longer we wait, anticipation can become indifference. Excitement can turn into apathy. Delays aren't really our thing, possibly because we fail to see any purpose for them.

Yet a delay is an opportunity. An opportunity to finally have a conversation that you have been putting off. An opportunity to learn something new or pick up a book you have been meaning to read. An opportunity to reconcile, to work on a broken relationship. An opportunity for a nap and rest. Above all, a delay is an opportunity to grow into a deeper relationship with God and to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. We proclaim this in preparation for the Eucharistic feast. Christ is present with us in the bread and wine. He is present in our hearts and souls. As we wait for his physical return we are called to live a servant life, so that others can see the hand of God at work in the world. It is imperative that we keep our eyes open to where God is calling us to act.

We are called to let Christ's light shine through us, lighting the way for his return. Each meal we serve to our unhoused friends testifies to Christ's presence. Every time we share someone's burden, we bear witness to the presence of Jesus. The socks, gloves, and hats we collect serve to clothe Christ. We must live Christ's commandment to show unconditional love to one another.

And when the metaphorical oil in our lamps has run out, when we feel like we are running on fumes, we can know that it is OK to rest and recharge. After all, when God created the world, he didn't keep on going like the Energizer bunny®. He rested. Our spiritual batteries, the things that keeps us doing the work that Jesus has given us to do, are recharged by staying connected to God and to God's love for us. Perhaps that connection comes through knitting or baking. It might

come from spending time with family or outside in the beauty of creation. The connection to God that we all share comes through prayer and worship together.

As followers of Christ, we wait together. As Paul tells the Thessalonians, “Therefore, encourage one another.” When we come together as followers of Christ, we can bolster each other’s lagging spirits through our connection with one another. We give each other hope as we wait. We comfort each other. Together we celebrate joys, console and lend strength, and share the grief and pains that come with life. These moments bear witness to Christ risen. Church happens in many places- wherever two or three are gathered together in his name. It is a thin place between human and divine, where we are reminded of Christ’s promises and are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. It helps us to find God in the waiting, to sense their presence always with us.

Waiting is hard, yet it is part of life. We wait for special days to arrive like birthdays and Christmas. We wait for the tides to turn, the sun to rise, and for Christ to come again. But we don’t wait alone. We are surrounded by the unfathomable love of God. Their love lifts us up and gives us the energy to share Christ’s love with the world around us. Our brothers and sisters in Christ help us to spiritually grow, strengthening our connection to God. Our shared life together helps us to find purpose as we wait for Christ to come again. We can’t stand idle as we wait; there is work to be done. We are called to light Christ’s way through acts of mercy, justice, and love for all God’s children.

Amen