

Fill your lamps with knowledge, faith and love.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

Last Sunday we began to explore this year's Gratitude Theme which is: One more step back into the future. This idea emerged from the movie "Back to the Future" where Dr. Brown creates time travel in a Delorian. Marty who is in high school is a friend of Dr. Brown, and enjoys all this experiments. The adventure begins with Marty ending up in the past in the time when Dr. Brown created time travel.

Recently I have got hooked into the series called Downton Abbey which takes place back in the early 1900's with the first world war, and the Spanish Flu. I have found many themes in this show that lend insight into the world we are living in today. The sense that things are changing, and the future is unknown. The struggle with loss and grief as people are killed by a pandemic, and from war. I began to wonder what we could learn from the past, and the one thing that sticks out is that we need to live in the present, here and now. Waiting is hard, delay is difficult, and yet all we can do is hold steady and be patient. What are we waiting for? (God to send us a message...)

The readings today speak directly to waiting for the coming of Christ. In the parable from the gospel of Matthew today we explore the allegory of the bridegroom who is Jesus, the bridesmaids who are the faithful. In this parable there are 5 wise bridesmaids and 5 foolish ones. One theologian suggests that "what distinguishes the foolish and the wise is readiness for the bridegroom, even in the face of the delay." In other words, the wise are ready for the delay.¹ I think it is fair to say that many of us today think, we have all the time in the world, and we put things off till the next day because of this belief. As I read this scripture I realized quickly that I am not as prepared as I think I am when it comes to the pandemic. These past few weeks have taught me that. It is a hard lesson to learn, as we see in the parable when the foolish bridesmaid are denied access into the wedding banquet. So am I prepared for the coming of Christ?

As faithful followers of Christ we find this decision and exclusion difficult and challenging to accept. Why would Jesus refuse our entry? This is not welcoming and inclusive. Why would the wise bridesmaids not share what they had with others, why would they not be

¹ Lindsay P. Armstrong, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 4, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), p.287.

generous? This parable was written to address preparation for the coming of Christ. This is an individual matter, and thus the oil represents our faith. “We cannot share our spiritual reserves. The oil can be understood as faith, good works, practices and spiritual reserves that remain constant and shine during good times as well as times of waiting for God.”² I can be a role model to others on how to prepare spiritually for the coming of Christ. I can be a role model by living in hope.

The letter to the Thessalonians from Paul also addresses the coming of Christ. The Thessalonians are waiting expectantly for his coming, but it is delayed. Both of these passages fall into the category of eschatology, the end of the world and last things. Jurgen Moltmann, a theologian argues that it is actually not about the end – but the beginning. It is about the new creation of all things. What we are living in right now, is not the end, this liminal time is the period of creation and a new beginning, a reset, a place where the ideas, our imaginations, our dreams and the dream of God’s kingdom lived out here on earth is being created.³ What these passages are telling us and reminding us of, is that we need to prepare, and be patient in active waiting. We need to wait as Christians do, in hope. If you think about it, even “in the midst of life’s joy and pain, ease and adversity, intrigue and boredom, the faith of the wise remains enough. They keep their light shining before others, continuing in community, study and prayer, doing deeds of mercy, offering forgiveness, and spreading justice and peace. They have not relinquished their hope that the world and each one of us will one day be transformed and fully reconciled to God.”⁴

In the movie trilogy *Back to the Future* the characters are provided with the benefit of foresight and retrospection. They see how decisions made by their ancestors guide the future. They also get the opportunity to experience the future and then go back to the present and make corrections on the journey of life to reflect what they hope for the future. This parable teaches us of the importance of doing our spiritual work now. We need to prepare ourselves, we need to tend to our relationship with Jesus and God. Being a good steward means that we are prepared and committed to living as God has called us to do. As a faith community we need to reaffirm our Identity, and name what we most value. This work will help us to see more clearly our purpose, our mission in the world. We too are called to fill our spiritual oil lamps. This requires living with patience, and hope and in difficult times, while holding on to our faith and living in love. We don’t know when Jesus will arrive, but he will arrive and has continued to appear in our lives in surprising and unexpected ways. John Buchanan believes that: Jesus Christ

² _____, p.287.

³ Jennifer M. McBride, Lindsay P. Armstrong, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), p.282.

⁴ Lindsay P. Armstrong, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), p.287.

comes when Christian people live in hope and never give up; Jesus Christ comes when faithful disciples express love and compassion and work for justice; Jesus Christ comes when critically ill people know they are ultimately safe in God's love. Heaven breaks into earth when faithful women and men live in hope and give themselves to the world of the kingdom.⁵

⁵ John M Buchanan, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 4, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), p. 336