



Watch Out! – TouchPoint for November 4, 2020

Matthew 25:1-13 NRSV “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept.

⁶ But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut.

¹¹ Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹² But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

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

Last week I talked about the beatitudes and spoke of wearing the “Spiritual Giant” mask. You know, the one who knows it all and can’t ever say, “I don’t know.” Or “I’m unsure about this.”

Well, one week later, I am taking off that mask and saying in unequivocal terms, “I have no idea what to do with this passage.” I mean, I suppose I can go into all kinds of historical background on who Matthew is writing to and the issues they are facing of expecting Jesus to come back and he hasn’t. Or their issue with the Jewish community, of which they saw themselves a part, but that is starting to fray and come apart.

Now, intellectual explanations of historical and contextual value may satisfy the mind, but they very rarely calm the spirit. So, I’m going to be brutally honest on this one and say, “I’m in the dark on this.” You see, there is so much going on here that doesn’t add up for me.

To start, it’s not the bridesmaids’ fault that the feast is postponed. It’s the bridegroom’s fault. He’s delayed. He’s the one who for one reason or another hasn’t planned this thing out very well. Could he not corral his family for the pictures? Did he misplace the wedding license? Was the caterer not paid and holding things up until he was? We don’t know why the delay, but we know it isn’t the bridesmaids’ fault. It falls on the bridegroom. So why get mad at the bridesmaids?

And if the bridegroom is supposed to be Jesus, why does his behavior contradict his earlier words in his life. You know, “Knock and the door shall be opened. For EVERYONE who knocks, the door shall be opened.” And why is the door closed anyway? In the Book of Revelation, when the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven and sets up shop on earth, the gates to the city are NEVER closed.

And the bridesmaids who get in, they’re the selfish ones. They get rewarded for their selfishness. And how does that fit in with Jesus words, “If you have two coats, give one away.” Or even in a metaphorical way, “I was hungry (for oil) and you fed me.” And who are you going to go buy some oil from at midnight. There were no 24-hour mini-marts.

I’m sorry, but there is too much going on here that doesn’t add up for me.

I mean, if I were to summarize this parable in very generic terms, I would put it this way. The guy in charge is a jerk. The only ones who get into his party are the selfish and greedy ones, and those who are in need are left out.

Wow, if only there were some dots that we could connect from this passage to our present situation!

But even with that. Sometimes biblical literalism doesn't help at all. You can't always draw a direct line from every detail in a parable to a specific person or event. It will lead to just another dead end.

So, let's move on.

I know this passage is one of the favorites for those I will call, "End times" people. You know, those people who are absolutely sure we are living in the end times and this passage was written just for US... And only for US. Which is about as spiritually narcissistic as you can get.

Look, I hate to break it to the "End times" people, but we human beings are 0 for 2000 years on getting that guess right. And if this passage is only for those who will be present for the "End Times", only for those who will be alive at the so called "Second coming", then this passage has been an irrelevant passage for last 2000 years. It has been an absolute waste to anyone who has lived and died between the time of Jesus and now.

And I guess I'm not willing to write this passage off so easily.

So maybe this passage isn't written for those who live in the end times, or will be around at the second coming. Maybe this passage is written for those of us who live in the darkness. In the in-between time. In the liminal space time.

And if you don't think we live in darkness, have you been paying attention to the political situation? As of the time I write this, the election is not over. By the time I give this Touchpoint on Wednesday, the voting will be over. But will the election be over. Who knows? What I do know is that whoever wins, many people in the country will think we have been thrown into greater darkness. That their light has been dimmed and maybe even extinguished.

But back to the passage. Since we do not know the day or the hour, perhaps we should stop trying to figure it out and get on with what we are supposed to do in the meantime. In this time of darkness.

And so, what is our calling in this time of darkness? It is to "keep awake". To watch, to wait, to be ready for the breaking in of the kingdom. At the time we least expect it, and my guess is, in ways we least expect.

You see, here is the promise. The kingdom has come and it is continuing to come. While it may seem that the time is delayed, perhaps if we were just more awake, we might see where the kingdom is breaking in, re-entering the darkness of every generation.

Because, here is the promise, that in the midst of darkness, the bridegroom comes. The feast is present.

Is this what so many mystics refer to as the "Dark night of the soul"? Is this what the prophet Amos refers to when he says the "Day of the Lord is darkness, not light"?

That it is in those times when our light is dimming or going out, that the bridegroom comes.

You see, maybe this parable isn't so much prescriptive of the end times, as it is descriptive of those who live in the time of waiting. Feeling in the dark. Feeling their light and lamp dimming and going out. And the fear we experience in that.

You see, the problem with the bridesmaids isn't that they ran out **of oil**. It's that **they ran out**. They ran away. They thought they had to supply their own oil. Their own light. The problem was they ran off thinking they weren't good enough and needed something more. They could have walked along side of the bridesmaids with the oil.

But, NOOOO!

They were more concerned about their individual plight than the bridegroom, or the party. They didn't believe their presence was enough. They thought they needed something more. And so, they missed out on the party of grace.

How much are we like those bridesmaids! Absolutely sure we need to bring our own light. And when it dims, we run off to prove ourselves worthy. And we miss out on the gracious presence of the kingdom. When the bridegroom came, it was their presence that was lacking, not their light or oil.

Look, I know this doesn't fit with every detail of the parable, but the parable doesn't fit with hardly any details of Jesus life and death and resurrection. So, if you want to know which side I'm going to fall on, it's the side of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. And not on an outlier parable.

But then again, that's just me. If you got something better, go for it. And let me know what you got, so when this passage comes around in the common lectionary in another 3 years, I won't avoid it like I should have this time.

As I said at the beginning, I'm in the dark on this one... which is maybe where I should be. I mean, that is the one thing that seems to fit with my life situation. So often feeling in the dark.

So, Jesus words in this passage to his followers are the one thing I can relate to. The need to stay awake, keeping my eyes out, for the bridegroom who has married himself to creation and all of its creatures. And comes at times when I least expect it. And I might add, in ways and through people I least expect.

No, maybe it's ok to be in the dark. And I just need to adjust my eyes...

So I can participate in the feast that is set before me.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

Be Still, know that I am God

Come O Lord and Set Us Free

Come, O Lord and set us free.

Give/Bring your people peace.

Come, O Lord and set us free.

Come Lord Jesus, Come.

1. And take our guilt away. Give us your pardon Lord.
2. Free from our self-obsession. Free from each fond possession.
3. Free to affirm each other...as sister and as brother
4. Reshape the world you made. Let what your hand created...be always celebrated.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Lord's Prayer

The Meal

Let Us Break Bread Together

Let us 1) break bread, 2) drink wine, 3) praise God

together on our knees (repeat)

When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,

O Lord, have mercy on me

Benediction

A Blessing

May the Lord bless you.

May the Lord protect you and guide you.

May His strength uphold you.

His light shine upon you.

His peace surround you.

His love enfold you.

May the Lord bless you.

