

Emmanuel November 8, 2020

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Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus said, "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 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.' 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. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

"The kingdom of heaven will be like this".

The wedding described in Matthew, would have been in a community where it was your family, friends and friends' families. A community where marriages would be arranged within the community. The bridegroom would be about 18, and his bride would be a bit younger, a teenager just hitting puberty.

Think of downtown Staunton as your village. In fact, we could walk from one end to another. The bride's father would probably work out the marriage with the prospective bridegroom's father.

Once the marriage was arranged, the bridegroom would begin building a room or addition for them to live in. Often attached to his family's house. And the person who determined when the addition was finished, was the bridegroom's father. And the wedding procession doesn't begin until the groom's father says the wedding room is ready. So, the teenage bride and her bridesmaids are on alert. Not knowing when they might be called into action. But having their lamp, oil and clothing right next to them. No one from outside the community would be invited, because everyone you knew was right there. Everyone would know both the bride and bridegroom. And since we know the bridesmaids are there to light the way to the wedding, we presume this will be an evening or night celebration. In fact it says the groom comes at midnight. Ten bridesmaids have their lamps ready, but only five brought extra oil. So five bridesmaids weren't ready, hadn't thought through that their obligation was to light the way

to the wedding. And those five are left behind. And there is a procession, with the bride and her groom at the front, and as they pass houses, the rest of the community falls in to join in the celebration. And there will be singing and dancing, and the bridesmaids may also be scattering flowers along the way. And once they get to the wedding banquet, they close the door. And anyone who took too much time to get ready, or didn't wake up in time would be just like the five bridesmaids who had to go buy more oil. They did not stay alert. When they ask to be let in, the door doesn't open, in fact, they are told they weren't prepared. They weren't prepared to welcome Christ.

My guess is the kingdom of heaven is **not** the way things have been going lately. Perhaps, we should concentrate on loving our neighbor, helping our neighbor. The kingdom of heaven is not here on earth.

For the last 5 years, I have avoided the news. I was frustrated with the amount of money spent on political campaigns instead of being used for school lunches, shelters, literacy tutors. And this week, I read our newspaper more carefully. And it isn't very pretty. This is 2020. And in some ways, it seems we have regressed. Here are a few of the stories that struck me, some good, some bad, some neutral. Many of them evidence that we are not watching out for our neighbors.

VMI has been ordered to investigate racism within the college. For example, a white student threatened to lynch a black student, and a white professor told her class that her father was a member of the Ku Klux Klan.

The coronavirus hit new records around the world.

The man in Louisiana who burned three African American churches did it to raise his profile as a "Black Metal" musician.

In Staunton there are discussions if the city should become a second amendment sanctuary, so they won't enforce any gun laws they feel are unconstitutional.

Voters are now checking online, to make sure their ballot was marked as received.

Steve Bannon was banned from Twitter after he suggested that Anthony Fauci and Christopher Wray should be beheaded for failing to adequately back Trump.

The Vatican will be releasing a report into exCardinal Theodore McCarrick's long history of sexual misconduct.

The Masters will be played this fall, without spectators, and without the beautiful spring flowers.

The ACC, or Atlantic Coast Conference has started emphasizing mental health awareness, and perhaps, that a football player can be man enough to say he has some issues to work out.

In North Dakota, David Andahl won a seat as a state representative a month after he died from covid.

If you watch any Hallmark or Lifetime channels, the Christmas movie season is two months long, and the two main characters always end up together, with a happy ending.

Delaware elected the country's first transgender state senator.

There's a one page ad offering gold bars, layered with 24 karat gold for sale, but only if you live in one of the states that the gold bars were minted for.

DuPont Credit Union's employees held a virtual 5K Columbus Day weekend, and raised \$ 6,475 to the Covid-19 Response Fund.

Oh, and if you are waiting for the day after Thanksgiving to do your Black Friday shopping, you'll be a few weeks too late. Some stores started Black Friday sales in October.

Back to our reading from Matthew. The bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him to the banquet, to the celebration. Those who weren't ready were left outside. And the Lord told them he did not know them, or perhaps, he didn't recognize them as ones who were ready for Christ's coming.

There are verses from the 14th chapter of John that refer to the bridegroom going to his father's house and build a room or set of rooms for he and his bride to live in. " In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and welcome you into My presence, so that you also may be where I am. "

Waiting and watching for the kingdom of heaven. Being sure to stay ready, not to be complacent. Not reading or listening to the news doesn't make it go away. There will always be much we need to help with, to love and help our neighbor. To make sure we are always prepared, waiting for Christ. Amen.