

Sermon 27a: Waiting by Filling Up our Lives with the Oil of God's Love and Presence

Introduction: We Have Trouble Waiting

I want to begin this sermon with the acknowledgement of the challenges in our nation;

And a political and election season that are as difficult and divisive as any I have known;

But I am not preaching a sermon on the election or secular politics;

My role in this community is to remind us and to point us to the reality;

That we belong to another kingdom;

And because we do, we are called to live a particular way,

Whatever our secular politics may be.

By God's grace and love, you and I have been invited and belong to the kingdom of God;

And to God's call to love and to walk the way of love on this earth until He comes again;

And the Gospel for this morning has an important message and corrective

To the way so many of us are living the Christian life;

A corrective and a challenge so that we can wait more actively for Christ to come

And live in a way, every day, that gets us ready and is inviting others into the kingdom of God.

We say in the Creed Sunday by Sunday that we believe He will come again;

We believe that Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead

And that God's kingdom will have no end;

But we've been waiting a long time for Christ to come again and restore all things;

And because we don't like to wait, the quality of our waiting always needs to be revisited.

Keeping awake or paying attention while you and I are waiting for anyone or anything

Has got to be one of the great challenges of life;

Oh some people are efficient and can pay attention to what's coming while they wait

But most of us and sometimes all of us just don't want to wait;

And we turn our minds and hearts to different things that seem more immediate.

We focus on more short term goals and interests

And the result is that too many times, we think and live and act

As though Christ's coming again has very little to do with our lives;

When the reality is that it has everything to do with our lives.

And though it's almost 2,000 years since Jesus said He would come again;

And His coming should be even more important in our minds and in our lives

Since each year, since each moment draws us closer to this day of the Lord;

Most of us aren't really waiting in preparation for Jesus to come again;

Aren't waiting and living in ways that will ensure we're ready;

And will be welcomed into the Kingdom of God in all its fullness.

But we believe He will come again;

And so it's something you and I need to prepare for every day;

By the way we lead our lives.

The Gospel: Keeping Oil in our Lamps

Now, there are two types of parables that Jesus tells about the Kingdom of God;

About the welcome, the love, the mercy and the life with God now and in the future.

The first type of parable or teaching story could be called the 'surprised by grace' stories;

Stories that reveal God's mercy and love overflowing in unexpected and undeserved ways

Like the welcome home party for the Prodigal Son;

The workers who work for only one hour who are paid for the whole day;

The social outcasts invited to the wedding party;

The parable of the lost sheep and the shepherd's search for it.

These parables reveal the love and the grace and forgiveness of God today, in real time;

The love that's available and offered to all of us by God's grace;

An open invitation to the life with God now,
No matter who you are, no matter what you've done,
No matter how far your or my life has strayed from God.

And the second kind of parable Jesus tells about the kingdom of God;
Could be called "life on life's terms" or growing in faith or not growing in faith stories;
The Anglican priest Robert Capon calls these the Parables of Judgement.

These parables are about the life in God after we've accepted God's invitation, grace and love;
Stories that speak to the quality of our lives as Christ's followers
And the way we've been called to wait for his coming again.

These stories present a more cause and effect pattern about the life in God;
The harvest follows the planting; A mustard seed of faith grows into a great tree of faith;
The parable of the talents; the parable of a person not wearing the robe
Of forgiveness and love who is tossed out of the heavenly wedding feast.

The parable this morning falls into this second category of Jesus' teachings;
These stories about how we are called to live our lives
After we've accepted God's gracious invitation to the way of love.

Jesus uses a Hebrew wedding as the backdrop to this teaching about active waiting,
Weddings in Jesus' day, like our day, were great occasions;
And the way a wedding usually played out was that most of the village
Would be invited to the wedding banquet as witness that the couple was married;
Meeting them along the way to come along to the weeklong reception.

The bride and bridegroom might have taken the longest road to their home;
To show everyone that they were married and to receive the glad good wishes
And blessings of as many people as possible as they entered into their new life together.

The ten bridesmaids are waiting to give their blessing and good wishes, lamps at the ready;
And then follow them to the wedding feast.

But as we heard in Jesus' parable, the bridesmaids make different preparations for their wait;
All are invited to the wedding feast, but only five are prepared for the wait;
And when the bridegroom is late,
(and I am always shocked when a wedding starts on time);
And they are awakened by the cry that He's come;
Five realize they don't have enough oil in their lamps
And ask to borrow some from their friends who have been more prepared.

The five bridesmaids who have enough oil say "no" to their request;
And the others go off in search to find more oil for the celebration;
Only to miss the bridegroom and to be shut out of the wedding feast;
And here's the importance of this story for our waiting for Christ to come again.

On first look, you'd think the bridesmaids who had extra oil are being selfish;
For not sharing their oil with the other five. "What an unchristian thing to do!"
But remember this is a parable about preparing for Jesus' coming.

And the oil isn't oil; it's the life of faith, the oil's the life turned toward God;
The oil is the life of living the way of love, of loving your enemies;
Of storing up wealth not on earth, but in heaven where it lasts;
And it is not something that can be borrowed from another person.

You and I can't live on someone else's oil and you can't go and buy it in some store;

We can help one another and love one another in so many ways;

But at some point we're on our own in our life with God.

You see, the road of discipleship, the way of love, the expectant hopeful living for God's coming

Is a narrow road and can only be walked side by side, you with God, God with me.

And the bridesmaids who have enough oil – enough trust in God, enough faith,

Enough good works, enough love for God and for everyone else;

Have enough because they've prepared themselves by turning to God

And have been living in the faith and hope that one day He will come again;

No matter if God appears to be late – they have the oil that keeps their lamps and lives burning.

Living Each Day in the Hope of His Coming Again

This is a hard parable as are all the parables of judgement, but they come with hope and grace;

Our lives are not anything goes. Not God loves us and so how we live doesn't matter;

It does matter and we need to keep our lamps our lights burning with God's love

And in hopeful expectation of His coming again, because He promised he would

And God always keeps God's promises.

On the way to my childhood Episcopal church, we had to drive near Park Cities Baptist Church,

A sizable congregation of probably 10,000 members;

And because Dallas is so flat you could see their towering steeple and clock

From a long way off, we knew whether we were running late or not.

The clock was the landmark that we were getting close to our church;

But what intrigued me for many years were the two words on the face of the clock;

Two words that speak to a spiritual truth that marks the life of every Christian;

Night Cometh.

Now as a smart mouthed kid, I thought those Southern Baptists might be a little slow;
And needed to remind themselves and one another that night followed day, night cometh;
So that could arrange their lives properly.

But seeing those words several times a week for many years;
Made me realize that the Southern Baptists weren't the ones who were a little slow – I was;
And anyone who expects that this life we've been given will continue unchanged
Or unaffected by God's plan of salvation and needs to know the truth.

For Christ is coming again; Either on the day of our death or when He brings heaven to earth;
When the kingdom comes in all its fullness.

And so on this Commitment Sunday, when we are making a financial commitment
To support the mission and ministry of St. David's Church;
Let us commit or recommit ourselves to the way of love and active waiting by
Spending part of each day tending our lamps through prayer, through reading the Bible,
Through loving our neighbors, through loving our enemies and seeking the good of all;
Through offering the best part of our lives to God and for God;
To fill our reservoir of oil so that we can keep our lamps, our lights burning;
Until Christ comes again.

We don't know when Jesus will come again; it could be today
And staying focused while we wait is a great challenge of the Christian life;
But if we will wait in faith and hope and love;
If we will set our hearts and minds and lives on this way of Love
Then we will be ready when He comes and not only ready;
But also welcomed by God into God's kingdom forever.

Amen.