

The 23rd Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 27 – Year A – The Rev. Canon Joan Anthony 11.8.20
Amos 5:18-24, Psalm 70, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Matthew 25: 1-13

Another parable. Jesus taught in parables because they were so much more accessible than straight, instructional teaching. Parables are at heart stories and we connect to stories and remember them. Parables are ideas enacted and they encourage us to imagine ourselves in turn as each of the parts. The elements of these teaching parables stand for something in our experience so that we can look at what is essential in our spiritual lives and see it in a new way. Is it any wonder that Jesus so often taught in parables?

The story of the ten bridesmaids, five wise and five foolish is about how we are to live in this world as people of faith and action. To live as part of what Presiding Bishop Curry calls the Episcopal expression of the Jesus revolution. Living while waiting is something we all know a lot more about than we did just a few short months ago. We have been getting a lot of practice. Waiting for election results, waiting for the time when masks will no longer be necessary, waiting for the time when we can gather without worry of infection. In the midst of that waiting, contrary as it may seem, we need to live, and in living to act.

In our parable, the only difference between the five wise and five foolish bridesmaids is the way in which they wait. The wise are prepared to wait in a beneficial way. They bring extra oil.

Remember, each element in a parable translates to something in our lives. Consider for the moment, that each of us is a lamp, a light of Christ in the world that is dark. We bring oil so that our lamps, our lives can shine brightly while we wait. This oil has been called “responsible deeds of discipleship” or in other words, our actions of love and mercy. What we do while we wait is important, what we do, how we act toward God and toward our neighbors is a visible and enacted parable of hope, trust and faith for the better world that God is even now bringing about. Little things, small mercies matter.

The parable ends with Jesus instructing his followers to keep awake for they do not know the day or the hour. Day or hour of what? Most interpret this to refer to the day or hour of the end of time. It can, I would suggest, be a more daily instruction. Stay awake to the opportunities that may present themselves for that “responsible discipleship” of love and mercy. If we faithfully do what we can to be a light in the world, the love God will shine forth in our lives and the lives of others in surprising and unexpected ways. In that way the waiting that we are enduring will be rich in compassion and charity.

I invite you in the week ahead to ponder what it means to be the light, the lamp of God. How in this week can you live more expectantly and hopefully? What is the oil of love and mercy that prepares you to continue to be that light as you wait? May you be blessed and a blessing in the week ahead.