

**“Ready or Not” - Matthew 25.1-13 – Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs**

The question is “Are We Ready?” And the reality is that “Ready or Not”, the future is coming. This story is about being ready now and being ready for whenever it will be now. To help us to get ready to hear this story we should put it in context of what Matthew wrote in the previous chapter. *Now Jesus left the temple and was going away. His disciples came to point out to him the temple buildings. <sup>2</sup> He responded, “Do you see all these things? I assure that no stone will be left on another. Everything will be demolished.” <sup>3</sup> Now while Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately and said, “Tell us, when will these things happen? What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?”* (Matthew 24.1-3) In the rest of that chapter Jesus teaches about the end times (I invite you to read all about it.) And then here he shares in this parable that there are two types of people, those who were well prepared and those who were sort of prepared. There were those who were in it for the long haul, and those who were in it for a shorter duration.

This parable is not in any of the other gospels. It may have been a story for the people of Matthew’s day, sometime after AD 70 when the Romans put down an uprising and destroyed the temple [see Matthew 24.15!]. It seems that some disciples were hanging in there waiting for decades for Jesus’ return, but others were giving up under Roman persecution and Jesus’ delay in returning. For sure some were on fire for the faith when they first believed. But things seemed to change over time and some lost their faith as their fires went out and they drifted away.

Matthew used this story as a warning to the readers to not to quit and miss out. I wonder, does it say anything to us and to people of today who have dropped out and drifted away from church? It would be a rewrite of the story, perhaps where the wise ones actually do share some of the oil of their faith with those who were running on empty. But Matthew had a focus on the believers who were maybe close to the end to make sure they were ready for the long haul and that day when Jesus would return.

John Wesley was asked what he would do if he knew his Lord would return at that time the next day. He said in effect, *“I would go to bed and go to sleep; wake up in the morning, and go on with my work, for I would want Him to find me doing what he had appointed.”* I can relate, rather than zeroing in on waiting, let’s do what Christ has called us to do until Christ calls us home. BTW that is the focus of the story next week. Wait for it!

Have you ever wondered, Why Jesus has not returned yet? It’s been 2000 years! A few years ago I was at the conference office with a group planning the next meeting and as dates were suggested and passed over because one of us or another could not commit to this one or that one, I offered that perhaps that was why Jesus had not yet returned, he was simply waiting for a good day for all of his followers. Is next Tuesday good for you? How about a week from Friday?...

One of the theologians I follow is Leonard Sweet. He noted how bad news sells. Bad news, dour predictions, impending disaster, keep us riveted. So, it is little wonder that “risk management” has given us all sorts of “disaster preparedness” plans—personal, community, state, and national. We get Covid shots. We get flu shots. We get pneumonia shots. We make a family “escape plan” for getting out of the house if it catches fire. We have first aid kits. We

keep an emergency roadside kit in the trunk of our car. We participate in “fire drills” and “emergency evacuations.”

Some of us are “prepared” enough to stockpile bottled water, canned foods, prescriptions medications, batteries and blankets. During the height of the Cold War, the most-prepared-for-the-worst-people built bunkers, underground fallout shelters, and stocked them for a long period of underground existence. I am expecting that with the current state of world affairs, we might see a return to those days of yesteryear.

Leonard Sweet says that: Preparing for disaster is something many of us are prepared for. But then he turns the tables and asks: *What about being prepared for ... joy or blessings?* The traditional Boy Scout motto of “Be prepared” taught generations of kids lots of useful skills. But those “skills” were put into practice by going camping and fishing, rock climbing, toasting marshmallows over a campfire...fun stuff! They were preparing for good times, not just bad.

As Christians we are called to “be prepared” but not just for all those “trials and tribulations” that grab the headlines. Today’s gospel text tells us in parable form how Jesus wants us to be “prepared,” so that we can party with Jesus! Are you prepared to party? As we begin to pay down and then pay off our building, we are preparing to grow more disciples and become the church Jesus wants us to be, ready for anything. “Ready or Not,” winter is coming...2024 is coming...eternity is coming! I want to be ready. How about you? Alleluia and Amen.

### **Hear the Word That Christ Taught**

Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs 11/6/23

Hear the word that Christ taught,  
Of the bridesmaids learning,  
We are either ready or not,  
For the groom’s returning.

Some had oil in their lamps,  
Others on empty ran.  
While for the long haul some were champs,  
The others had no plan.

It's a different story,  
If their oil they had shared.  
All would enter into glory,  
For all would be prepared.