

Year A Proper 32 Fuel Up and Get Ready Matthew 25:1-13

Today we have another story from Jesus that says, “The kingdom of God is like...” This time we have 10 bridesmaids – 5 wise bridesmaids who are prepared or ready and 5 foolish bridesmaids who are not prepared or not ready. Jesus is the bridegroom and the moral of the story is that we need to be ready for his coming, right? Well, it’s not quite that simple.

All 10 bridesmaids brought their oil lamps. All 10 bridesmaids were excited about the bridegroom coming. All 10 bridesmaids fell asleep. So, they were all equally ready for the bridegroom’s arrival but, the important part, the thing that set apart the wise from the foolish, was that 5 of those bridesmaids were ready for his delay.

That’s the key – we need to live like the kingdom could arrive later on this afternoon and like it may not come in our lifetime. And being ready for God’s kingdom is not like being ready for any other event because earthly events have a beginning and an end. Jay does a lot of traveling around our diocese in his vehicle and so, every fall, he restocks his emergency kit just in case he gets stuck somewhere during the cold winter. He packs a sleeping bag, waterproof matches, a couple of flares, some food, and a bunch of other stuff and that stays in his vehicle all winter long. He’s prepared, he’s ready for a winter emergency. But that event, like all earthly events, will have a beginning and an end – he would be rescued eventually. So he can prepare by taking a few minutes out of one day to pack that emergency kit into his vehicle and then he’s done. He’s prepared and doesn’t have to do anymore, doesn’t need to think about it anymore.

That is not at all the same as getting prepared for God’s kingdom because God’s kingdom does not have an end...once it fully arrives, it’s here to stay. And so we

can't just take a few minutes out of one day to get ready for it and then be done. We can't pack a few things for God's kingdom into a box, store it somewhere, and put it out of our minds. We're ready. No. Getting ready for God's kingdom is an all day, every day sort of thing.

How do we get ready to live in God's kingdom? Luckily for us, Jesus' story tells us.

We need to fuel our light. Jesus tells us to let our lights shine before others that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. He also says that our eyes are the lamp for our body. If we have good eyes then our whole body will be filled with light. Put these two things together and Jesus is telling us that the way we look at the world and the things that we do mark us as Christians because when we love God with all that we are, that is noticeable...Our eyes will look at the world with love and compassion and search out what needs to be fixed in this broken world and we will work to fix it. The way we look at the world – our eyes – will fill our body with light and the good works that we do will also shine. People will notice us shining and God will notice us shining. But all of this shining takes effort – it's a lot of work. It takes physical energy, mental energy, emotional energy, and – above all – it takes spiritual energy.

So this story tells us the importance and the urgency of fueling up. As all ten bridesmaids wake up to realize, the time for getting oil and building reserves will run out suddenly and unexpectedly. Darkness, unfortunately, abounds in the world and it is in the darkness that we need assurance of the abundant promises of God, the peace that passes understanding, and a depth of hope that can sustain us through the darkness of disappointments and failures, devastating loss and grief and all that is wrong in our world. We will need hope urgently when a child is sick or when a parent is helpless. We need hope when faced with environmental destruction. We need

peace when we can't seem to make ends meet or when the news is filled with war and terrorist attacks. We need love in every relationship to survive the challenges whether it is with loved ones, friends, or even strangers that we meet asking us for help. And we will need joy when the pain of loss and grief seems never-ending.

How do we get the spiritual energy to face every day? How do we fuel up spiritually?

The important thing to notice is that there is a group of bridesmaids...not one...there are 10 of them and, even when some need to leave to buy oil, there are still five...the people waiting for the bridegroom are not alone...they are waiting together.

Jesus emphasizes the importance of faithful community throughout the Gospel of Matthew, and he tells us that life in Christ happens when two or three are gathered in his name. That is when Christ promises to be with us, and we can be assured the Holy Spirit is among us as we are gathered together, each of us replenishing our spiritual reserves as we worship together because we are immersed in God's love. Together in worship we meet God and each other in love that brings us into relationship – shaping us, forming us, filling us, empowering us.

Given everything Jesus tells us about community in the Gospel of Matthew, he cannot be satisfied with such a fractured community as these ten bridesmaids. The wise bridesmaids couldn't share with the foolish bridesmaids. Neither should we ignore our discomfort with its ending. The bridegroom wouldn't let the foolish bridesmaids in after they had gone to get more oil.

Thank goodness we hear this story while the bridegroom delays and the door to the feast is still open. We have the blessing of being ten bridesmaids together, each individually seeking deeply satisfying spiritual sustenance, and together receiving the

nurture of a spirit-filling community of faith. With one another, we receive assurance from Word and sacrament that sin and death do not have the last word. With one another, prayer rises up without ceasing even if in silence or sighs too deep for words. With one another, we study God's Word and share experiences of that Word living in the world. With one another, we serve a world in need and we witness God's constant work of resurrection and transformation. With one another, God's spirit moves to meet the reality of human suffering with the mystery of hope. With one another, in the community of faith is where the love of God continues to appear in surprising and unexpected ways.

That is why Joshua – after he had led God's people into the Promised Land – insists each one of the Hebrews commit themselves to being a community of faith not just on one day of intense emotion, but through a lifetime of "inclining [their] hearts toward the Lord" (Joshua 24:23). Like ten bridesmaids sitting together holding their flickering lamps against the darkness, we are waiting expectantly for the feast to start. It is in our community of faith that we hear the good news that the bridegroom is surely physically coming to make all things new and Jesus spiritually already is among us offering to us himself, to bring us into relationship with God who is love – our spiritual fuel. We come together in worship to receive this gift, to share it, and to cherish it day and night in sure and certain hope that for each one together in this community of faith, the best is yet to come. So fuel up and let your light shine in the world.