

**The Reverend Heinz D. Raidel**  
**Message / Sermon 24th Sunday of Pentecost**  
**November 5, 2023**

**When I was in seminary, not that long ago**, somebody was advertising on billboards in central Ohio that the world would end on a certain date in May. Well, my faith, my education, and casual observation told me and tells me that nobody has ever predicted the end of the world as we know it, and I felt fine.

I had a paper due for a certain class taught by professor Dr. James Childs on the day the sign said the world would end. So I decided to have a little fun with it. I said Dr. Childs I don't know if I should finish my paper because I am not sure but according to the billboards the world might end that day. Dr. Childs, straight face, said "you definitely want to finish that paper, because depending on how things turn out, either myself or Jesus is going to want to read it."

**Now some of you might be thinking "hold on pastor the end of the world is nothing to joke about."** And it's not. The end of the world, or Jesus' return, those are not things to joke about. And they are also not things to fear or dread. They are, rather, according to the promise of Jesus, things to look forward to. Things to celebrate. And things to patiently and faithfully wait for.

Side note, the second and third most difficult words in church are "wait" and "patiently." The most difficult word BTW is "change."

**The gospel reading today has some of those difficult words** and it also has some language that could be misconstrued to suggest fear of the changes that Jesus' return would bring. You might have heard it preached that way. But I want to take you all on an old fashioned sermon look at this reading and parable and show you both the troubles the early followers were experiencing and the good news Jesus shared for them through this parable 2000 years ago. And then I hope to share similar troubles we might be facing, and how Jesus's teaching is still good news and a faith and life lesson for us here and now.

**One thing though:** please understand this is something Jesus said knowing he was to be crucified, resurrected, and then ascend to heaven. Jesus shared this knowing he would be gone for awhile (so to speak), Jesus shared this knowing he was coming back. So this is one of those very clear cut parables of Jesus that was as much for the future faithful as it was for the present

Okay, important thing here: the people who were listening to this parable did not yet fully understand that Jesus was to be crucified and resurrected and then leave them for a while. But the subsequent followers of Jesus very clearly understood that Jesus had been resurrected and ascended into heaven and was no longer with them in body. So there is some “not knowing what's going on” happening

Also subsequent generations were full of persons who thought Jesus’ return was imminent. Subsequent generations were also full of people who were not so sure. They were waiting, and they did know for how long. Again this was taught by Jesus and recorded by Matthew for all of those groups. And us.

In these situations, it was easy to lose faith. It was easy for the people to start to question Jesus’ teaching. It was easy for the people to start to fall back into their old ways

**And so Jesus teaches them with the parable of the bridesmaids.** Some of the bridesmaids were wise, some were foolish. The foolish didn't do much planning for their present or future. The wise planned for every scenario by taking oil for their lamps.

Okay, time out for a tangent. You have heard this parabolic language before from Jesus. You have heard the church referred to as the bride of Christ right, and so it's obvious in the parable here some members of the church were not ready for when the groom (Jesus) came. The idea here being that the wise bridesmaids would be ready for Jesus to come anytime. Being wise, being ready, was the same thing as being faithful and so the wise would live their lives in the present (following Jesus teachings) and also be ready for the return of Jesus. Maybe a better way to say that: also be ready to celebrate the return of Jesus. Both of those. Live in present prepare for future

The unprepared bridesmaids who were out of oil are only a part of the parable, and we would be mistaken to make the entire parable and lesson about them.

Clearly the larger point here is that the groom does indeed return, and the faithful were living their lives in a faithful and ready way. Jesus is on his way. Live faithfully.

**So hear the good news for the people then.** In this parable, the awaited bridegroom shows up. Jesus returns. No matter what else is going on in their

worlds, Jesus returns for them. Regardless of what some of them do or do not do, Jesus shows up.

Yes, as I mentioned some folks will focus on the bridesmaids who were out of oil, and in doing so they clearly ignore the overwhelming action of Jesus staying true to his promise and coming back to bring the kingdom to everyone.

Jesus is returning, sometime, and all he asks is for the people to be faithful. Whatever is going on in their lives, Jesus will keep his promise and be back. So we listen and watch and wait faithfully.

**Now if I can bring us to the present.** We are still waiting for the return of Jesus, and waiting, and waiting. Realistically, are we waiting for the kingdom, or are we waiting for the kingdom and maybe for a few hundred other things in our lives?

Because I think when we are honest, we can admit we are waiting for a lot of things good and maybe not so good. Good and bad. Last week I was waiting for a text from my son that the offer he and his wife had put in on their house was accepted. At the same time my whole family was waiting for word that my niece had passed. We all wait for special calls. We wait for word from schools and career opportunities. We wait for a sign a family disagreement is over. We wait for a report to come in. And we wait for traffic if we live or work in a suburb or travel an interstate around Columbus Ohio.

**But there is good news in the parable, and there is good news for us. Spoiler alert: the good news 2000 years ago is the same good news for us.** Jesus knows we are waiting. Jesus knows waiting is not easy. But we are waiting for the return of Jesus. We are waiting for his kingdom to become real and present. We are waiting for all the things we read about in Revelation. Pain, death, sin, suffering, we wait for their final and full defeat. And all Jesus asks us, as the bridesmaids, is to wait faithfully. Jesus' return is certain; the question is HOW are we going to wait for it in faith?

First, we wait together. And we wait for and with each other, the wise and the foolish. The prepared and unprepared. We sit and wait with each other in times of pain and loss and hurt. We wait by celebrating together our achievements and by together consoling each other's disappointments. We wait by giving each other hope when hope is scarce, comfort when we hurt, courage when we are afraid. We wait by bearing each other's burdens. We wait by advocating for justice, being friends to the friendless, feeding the hungry and housing those without homes. And

we wait by being Jesus to the people around us, so that they too share in the celebration and the hope that the return of Jesus promises.

Waiting is not easy, and there are ups and downs, and being faithful to Jesus and the promise of his return and the kingdom will be a constant struggle. We dedicate ourselves to waiting faithfully because Jesus promised that he waits with us.

Word. Amen.