Concerning Foolishness

Menno Mennonite Church
November 8, 2026

Purpose: To explore the promises of Christ's return as we anticipate what God is doing.

Message: We are called to each look to the ways we disregard the coming of the Kingdom of God, and are invited to look with anticipation for what God is about to be doing.

Scripture: Matthew 25:1-13 (I will read); Amos 5:18-24 (please read)

Synopsis: When we look at the end of times, with all the promise and peril that holds, the basic take away is one of always being prepared. We look toward what will be and anticipate the coming Christ with a notion of being carefully and fully on alert. The expectation is the a parable such as Matthew's bridesmaid vigil does the same. Yet there is more here: all involved here fall asleep; not everyone is anticipating the lateness of the hour; no one is entirely prepared. Perhaps the take away here is not necessarily "don't be like the unwise ones" but rather "everyone has something to be mindful of as they wait". Our anticipation of Christ's coming invites us all into the anticipation of what is about to be.

Matthew 25:1-13 (CEB)

25 “At that time
the kingdom of heaven
will be like ten young bridesmaids
who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom.
2 Now five of them were wise,
and the other five were foolish.

3 The foolish ones took their lamps but didn’t bring oil for them.
4 But the wise ones took their lamps
and also brought containers of oil.

5 “When the groom was late in coming,
they all became drowsy and went to sleep.

6 But at midnight there was a cry,
‘Look, the groom! Come out to meet him.’

7 “Then all those bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps.

8 But the foolish bridesmaids said to the wise ones,
‘Give us some of your oil, because our lamps have gone out.’

9 “But the wise bridesmaids replied,

‘No, because if we share with you,
there won’t be enough for our lamps and yours.

We have a better idea.
You go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

10 But while they were gone to buy oil, the groom came.
Those who were ready went with him into the wedding.

Then the door was shut.

11 “Later the other bridesmaids came and said, ‘Lord, lord, open the door for us.’

12 “But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’

13 “Therefore, keep alert, because you don’t know the day or the hour.

Few things are quite so painful as being caught unprepared. Its annoying, inconvenient, and sometimes dangerous. Like the time that my brother and I decided to go backpacking as a bit of an afterthought one summer when he was in college. It seemed like a good idea so why not? We grabbed what we had, a little bit of gear and headed for the hills with good confidence as our primary notion. We took to the trail and were having a grand old time until the rain caught us (something that one should always anticipate out East) and we realized that our jackets were warm and dry because we had left them at home. Things got worse from there (really, once you are wet and tromping around in the woods, things tend to usually get worse). We had packed a good supply of classic camping food for cooking over the wet fire—pork and beans; stuff like that. Stuff that is really hard to eat when you left the can opener at home. So we got to enjoy the experiment of bashing open what we had to eat with the rocks we could find around us. Then it turns out that when you go gear shopping at goodwill on your way to the trail, tent performance is not guaranteed. Boy Scouts we were not, and we paid the price for it. By the second night, sleeping in a rusting Honda CR-X two door was downright luxurious. I keep telling my children: if you want good stories to tell, you first need to go through a reasonable amount of pain to acquire them.

The point is pretty straight forward be prepared or pay the price. I am sure that we all have at least a couple of cautionary tales where we were caught out in one fashion or the other. It is basic common sense and good wisdom to be prepared for what have you no matter what the situation. It is simply the right thing to do. We apply the same logic to our anticipation of Christ's coming, supported especially with stories like these. Be prepared; be alert and don't let your guard down is the watch word for the coming Christ. Parables like this are given us to connect us to the impending reality of the world that is about to come, inviting us to straighten up and fly right. That is certainly how we are given to reading and applying it. This is the test: don't get caught sleeping or you might not pass what is coming down the pike for you. We are to pay attention to the foolishness of it all, avoid it and be the wiser for it. But as is so often the case with parables, there is more going on here than just "don't be foolish." There is a fuller conversation going on here and we miss it when we keep the story just to the broad outline of what to avoid. We might ask, too, what we are to pick up from the other elements of the story.

We need to start with understanding the context. If you want to cite "what does Jesus say about the end of time?", you have come to the right place. Matthew 25 and the surrounding

chapters go into detail with explanation and articulation of what will be. this is one of a series of parables attempting to describe the kingdom of God and how it functions in the now even as it awaits the coming full realization of its final promise. It begins with the parable of the faithful and wise servant who continues to do the work of the master until the master comes (24:45-51). Although the master is delayed, he arrives to find the wise servant doing the tasks that have been appointed to him in the master's absence. This story is followed directly by the parable of the talents with its notions of shrewd investment and productive returns. It all culminates in the narrative of the day of judgement with the sheep and the goats. As with many things thought important, these teachings are echoed several times over exposing different facets of the same notion at work. This is a part of theme that is making a bigger splash than just this. Remember too: Matthew is not just recording verbatim what the narrative was. Time and space has passed and he is writing to an emerging church where the work of waiting on the Lord was an increasing preoccupation of the world that they were building. We need not doubt that these words are properly red as Jesus' thoughts, but the emphasis that Matthew applies to them also serves his context as more than just a stenographer.

We can understand the application of wisdom right away. There is an understanding and appreciation of being part of the wedding party. We don't need to know the last detail of ancient near east wedding culture to understand that things rarely go to plan. I have yet to witness a wedding that start precisely at the stroke of the appointed hour. The possibility of a derailed schedule was understood by all; it is the wise, though that took the task of being prepared for it. Nothing lavish or over the top; just a little extra fuel for the tasks that they we were about. In other words, there is responsibility there. They are not passively waiting for the bus to come but rather making sure that they are ready for the eventuality of what might come next. This is a wedding party and they are participants and not just guests. They take some role in the celebration's success. They are to wait with anticipation and agency as they anticipate the dawning of what will be. The same applies to being a follower waiting on the Christ. We are not to be mere spectators waiting to tell the genie God to make things better. God asks us to participate, to take responsibility for our selves and our world. We cannot look to others to do the work of faith for us.

Note too that this is not a screed for us to be constantly vigilant least we be found wanting. The bridesmaids are not two groups to be divided and compared. They are a whole

body of those who are anticipating what is about to be. Those without were given the option to go and find what they needed along the way. Matthew's audience, as we have said, is the church. We know that we belong together within the church whether we be "wise" or "foolish". There are both ways of waiting on the Lord and we are together in the waiting. We are also together in the reality of that waiting as well: everyone falls asleep. Everyone watches and waits. All of the lamps run low. The difference is the anticipation and active means of making the wait well.

In economics there is a concept called opportunity cost. It is a fairly simple notion. It asks the question of balancing the what you are doing at that moment with the cost of NOT doing the next best thing. Think of taking a nap—a wholly good and wonderful thing to do and entirely necessary for time to time. But if there is a choice between taking a nap and completing your taxes on, say, the 15th day of April, it might be a particularly costly time to take a nap because the time you spend resting might be balanced by the deadline hanging over your head (if you are given to such things). I am sure that for this crowd this doesn't need a whole lot of further explanation as you know it well. The cost of planting wheat is that you can't grow something else in that ground that might be more profitable when it comes time to sell. There is always something more to do while we wait.

We can get so focused on the bottom-line outcomes in these parables that we can forget what all goes into what Jesus is saying. Remember the context here. Jesus is getting ready to leave. In John's gospel we have chapters of Jesus' impassioned prayers for the disciples he was leaving behind. This is the parallel in Matthew. This is part of an extended sermon explaining the whys and wherefores of the kingdom as he prepares for his passion and resurrection. As such, they must be viewed in this way and part of the larger points he is trying to teach here. He has already taught them to take up the work of the kingdom in chapter 24, to be prepared for the coming of his return with anticipation and preparation. He is offering all of this by way of focusing them on what really matter in the end: the courage to take on the challenges of living in the kingdom present and not just the kingdom yet to come. The kingdom is here already. We get to tend it already even as we wait, too, for the not yet.

The important thing in watching for the coming kingdom is not the signs and the times, though they can be preoccupying when we read them. The truly important reality is to remember that there is much to do between now and then. The purpose is not to apply anxious waiting least we be found wanting, but to liberate us from the apathy of bland indifference simply waiting on

what will be without anything to say about it. These parables in series all reflect on the situation of not knowing and invite us to the work of vigilant waiting, doing the work of the kingdom now least the opportunity to encounter that kingdom might be denied from those in need of change. The future is unknown and the timeline is uncertain; if they were more clear we could better calculate our strategy to have it come out just right (part of why we are so obsessed with getting it right). Jesus does not give the disciples the details of the future that awaits them without his physical presence but he does let them know, and us know, that he entrusts all that he has built into our trust and care until it is fully realized in time.

We are not provisioning ourselves to be ready for disaster. We are supplying the goodness of the Kingdom now, even as we wait. We are invited to count the cost not just of what we do in the kingdom, but also of that which we decline for the want of courage. May we provisions not only wisely, but courageously, knowing that the faith of the kingdom causes all things to grown as God gives grace.