

Sunday – November 6, 2011
Pastor – Rev. Walter W. Westbrook
Sermon – **Ten Bridesmaids**

St. Matthias UMC
Fredericksburg, Va 22405
www.stmatthiasumc.org

Scripture: **Matthew 25:1-13**

This parable is an allegory. That means we can look through it and say, “This means this, and that means that.” And that is very helpful in understanding it.

So, the bridegroom is Jesus, coming at the end of the world. Of course, this could be the end of the whole world, the end of time. But, I think we might want to add the interpretation that it might be the end of just our part of the world, the end of our individual life.

The bridesmaids are the Church. We are the ones who know Jesus is coming, but we don't know when. Usually, in most allegories, we would interpret the bride as the Church, but this story presents no bride. So, we go with the idea that the bridesmaids are the Church.

Jesus tells us up front that there are 5 wise and 5 foolish bridesmaids. He has to. We can't tell them apart by just looking at them. They are dressed alike, and they're all carrying oil lamps that are lit.

So, how can we tell? 5 are prepared for the wedding feast, even if the groom is delayed. The other 5 are prepared only for their own timetable. And, we can't tell who's who until 5 lamps are sputtering out and 5 are still burning strong. It is this state of being ready or not being ready that is the point of the parable

What is readiness? Living the kingdom life, just as Jesus described in The Sermon on the Mount. Many people can live this life for a little while, but as the kingdom is delayed, they give up. Being a peacemaker once is good, but a lifetime as a peacemaker is very difficult. Being merciful for an evening is good, but a lifetime of mercy is very hard to manage. To live the kingdom life as a lifetime project requires preparation.

How do we prepare? We simply have to live as though we believe our relationship with God is the most important thing in our lives. When we live like that, we spend our time and money and effort in deepening that

relationship as much as we possibly can.

We spend our time in prayer. It's not a matter of making some devotional time. It's a matter of creating a devotional life. We spend time speaking to God. We spend time listening to God. We begin to see opportunities emerge: remembering things we're grateful for, the pain of friends and family, the overwhelming suffering of the poor and the sick and the lonely in the world. And we find opportunities to listen to God as we read the Bible or have conversations or listen to music or take in the news of the day. What is God trying to tell us?

In addition to all the different ways we find to pray, we can also study the Bible, the Christian spiritual masters across the centuries as well as today. And we find ways to serve God by serving others. Remember, loving God and loving our neighbor are the same thing. Let's not cheat on that.

And, of course, we prepare by worshipping together. God is no more present in this sanctuary than he is in any room in any of our homes. But, we may be more open to feeling God's presence here. So, we come here and we celebrate our life with God, renew our commitment to be good disciples, and try to feel closer to God than we have through the week. It is a time to focus on God above and beyond all else in our lives. Worship is certainly preparation for the time when the oil in our lamp is absolutely necessary to illuminate the kingdom of God.

Think of the light of our lamps as being what Jesus is talking about when he tells us we are the light of the world. You can imagine that Jesus was not suggesting that we could be the light of the world just when it's convenient, just when it's easy, just for a little while now and then. He is telling us that our whole lives need to be the light for the world.

And you can see how the wise bridesmaids simply cannot share their oil with the foolish bridesmaids, as selfish as that seems at first. The oil is not a commodity to be transferred from one person to another. It is a life filled with preparation for the coming of the kingdom. If the foolish bridesmaids simply failed to put forth the effort to be ready, there's nothing at that crucial moment the wise bridesmaids can do to help them.

Prayer, study, service and worship. These come together to fill the lamp of our life with the essence of kingdom living. We have been invited to the

feast. We know the bridegroom. We are supposed to provide the light for the feast. Let's be ready.