Sermon / 8 November 2026 / Matthew 25:1-13 / Keep Awake

From today's gospel: KEEP AWAKE!

There's a lot going on. Don't be distracted by all the noise. Don't get sidetracked by all the daily tasks that take us away from what really matters. KEEP AWAKE!

Don't become complacent. Don't assume someone else will carry your light. As we live the Good News of Jesus in the world, KEEP AWAKE!

KEEP AWAKE!

Today we heard the parable of the ten bridesmaids. It's a charming, almost fun story told by Jesus. And although familiar to many of us, it only appears in the Gospel of Matthew.

There are 10 bridesmaids. These young women have one job. When the bridegroom arrives, they are to escort him to the bride's house for the wedding banquet. We are told from the very beginning that 5 of these bridesmaids are wise and 5 are foolish.

They all have lamps to light the way for the bridegroom. The wise bridesmaids brough extra oi for their lamps. The foolish ones – not so much.

Most often, this parable is interpreted in a straightforward manner. The bridegroom is Jesus. We are the bridesmaids. And the oil represents our faith…our spiritual preparedness…as we are waiting for Jesus to arrive.

The parable continues. The bridegroom is very late. He's so late, that while waiting, all the bridesmaids fall sleep. When they are awakened by the news that the groom is almost there, they panic when they learn their lamps have gone out.

Half of the maidens with extra oil use it to light their lamps. The ones without oil ask their friends to share. They are told to find oil of their own….there isn't enough to share. Those without oil leave in search of oil. When they return, the wedding party has left and gone inside. They bang on the door asking to be admitted.

But the groom tells them he doesn't even know who they are. They are left out of the wedding party.

While an interesting story, it begs several questions.

I have a problem with the wedding escorts in this parable being labeled as either wise or foolish. Different people have different ways of being prepared. Just because some of the bridesmaids didn't expect to be kept waiting so long – and therefore not thinking they needed extra oil – doesn't necessarily make them foolish, it makes them human.

AND…Why were the "wise" bridesmaids so mean? Even if they didn't want to give away their extra oil, why did everyone need their own lamp lit? Couldn't each two of the bridesmaids share the light of one lamp? Surely they all knew the importance of their task. Why not use the oil they had and escort the bridegroom as originally planned?

Today's gospel comes from Matthew. And earlier in that book – Matthew 5:41- during his Sermon the Mount, Jesus instructs his followers:

"Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you."

So why are we now hearing a parable about some "wise" bridesmaids refusing to give to someone begging? It seems to me these stingy bridesmaids should be the ones who are punished. But they are rewarded in the end. Things that make you go, "hmmm."

AND….these supposedly foolish friends do their best to fulfill their task with no help from their sisters. They find oil and return but find the groom and the other bridesmaids have gone into the wedding banquet and closed the door. When they knock on the door to be let in, they are turned away.

But, again, earlier in Matthew's gospel – Chapter 7, verses 7 and 8 – Jesus tells his followers:

"Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door is opened."

I'm confused. Originally there were no conditions on the knocking. Jesus didn't say "The door will be opened…unless you are an unprepared, foolish bridesmaid."

So why in this parable are those who knock refused entry? To simpletons like me, it appears Jesus is contradicting himself.

And now, the point of my sermon…the kicker to the entire parable: Jesus's warning after he tells the parable – his point, the lesson, to the story he explains as this:

"Keep awake. For you know neither the day nor the hour."

Keep awake? Keep awake?

After that story, you'd think the lesson learned would be something like "be prepared" or "don't count on someone else to get you into the kingdom of heaven."

But "keep awake?"

If that was the lesson of the parable, then all ten bridesmaids failed! All ten of them fell asleep while they were waiting for the groom to show up.

And what I find so amazing is that Jesus told this parable to his disciples just days before his crucifixion. In the very next chapter of Matthew, we read the story of Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane and having to wake the disciples up three times during the night. It seems even the disciples couldn't really understand the lesson of this parable.

"Keep awake!"

By that, I'm suggesting that we always be vigilante to the world around us and to our own lives. This weekend, the diocesan delegates, wardens, and clergy of St. Mark's attended our annual diocesan convention. While listening to debate on resolutions to pray for citizens of war-torn countries in the Middle East and helping immigrants in our own country, we learned not everyone is ready to love their neighbor as themselves or welcome the stranger.

Jesus is the bridegroom. We shouldn't be waiting to escort Jesus at some time in the future - because Jesus is among us right now – right here. It is our job to light

the way for Jesus in this world. And it doesn't matter if you are wise or foolish…prepared for unprepared.
We must remember our single task – like those bridesmaids, we are to escort the groom…right now. The kingdom of God is here among us. Now. Let us light the way and bring Jesus to our party right now.

We are Christians and our job is to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to the world around us. That good news is the light we are called to carry into the world. That light is the good news of God's love, acceptance, mercy, and forgiveness for everyone.

So let your light so shine before all, so they may see your good works, hear the Good News, and glorify our God who is in heaven. That's also from Matthew's account of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

I don't think we are wise to stash away a supply of extra oil for some unknown day and time. The end of today's parable assures us we will NOT know the day or the hour. Our time would be much better spent making sure everyone has enough oil for their daily life right now.

And we are lamp carriers – light bearers – together. Wise and foolish, prepared and unprepared we are all going to light the way. What light are you going to carry?

Love? Compassion, empathy? Knowledge, truth, justice? Truth, mercy, forgiveness?

Keep Awake! In today's parable, Jesus assumes you're already awake and ready to light the way. But in case you're new to the party…wake up!

What really matters is that your heart - and your mind - and your spirit - are awake and always ready to accept God – accept Jesus – accept the Holy Spirit – and to share that knowledge and love with this world that so desperately needs to hear it

A world who needs to see the light we are bringing to it.

Keep Awake!

For God's presence is here among us right this very minute.

Keep Awake!