

B.Y.O.O. (Bring Your Own Oil)

Matthew 25:1-13

Introduction

Many times in the course of a lectionary year, the three assigned readings for a particular Sunday offer significant parallels that make choosing only one text a difficult task for the preacher. Sometimes the connections between the three are less obvious, but today is not that way. At least not for me.

My challenge on days like today is to find the starting point. The launching pad. The place that allows me to organize my thoughts in such a way that I can present the Word of God with clarity and meaning.

For me that starting point this morning is in the home of a Bride- in an unknown village in the Galilee early in the first century. We do not know the Bride's name. We do not know if she is tall or short, confident or scared to death. In fact, the Bride never appears in this story. Apart from the brief appearance of the groom in the final verses of the text, this story is totally about the ten bridesmaids.

To further set the context, I want to remind you of another verse of Scripture. You most typically hear this verse read at a funeral service, but the language used by Jesus in it is wedding day language. That is something every one of His listeners would have fully understood.

I go to prepare a place for you. And when everything is ready, I will come back and take you to myself so that you will be where I am. (John 14:2b-3, TPT)

Once the agreement had been finalized for a wedding to take place, the task of the Groom was to prepare the house where the newlywed couple would live. The amount of time between the proposal and the wedding date was solely dependent on how long it took for the house to be ready. Typically, that meant adding an addition – another room – to the home of the Groom's father.

Once every last nail was hammered, every last dab of paint was applied, every last picture was hung on the walls, it was time to go get the Bride. The Groom would summon his friends and begin the parade from the Groom's newly completed house to the home where the Bride lived. All along the parade route those who had been invited to the wedding would stop whatever they had been doing and join in the parade and the weeklong festivities that followed.

No one knew when that might be. It could be in the middle of the day or in the middle of the night, as it did in today's text. Only the Groom knew how close he was to being finished. Everyone else had to be prepared and had to wait.

Meanwhile, back at the Bride's house, the waiting included these ten bridesmaids. The text divides these young women into two categories. They were either "wise" or "foolish." Not "good" or "bad." There is no moral judgment here. Simply a commentary

about their level of preparation for the wait. Those who brought extra oil, anticipating the house-preparation project might take longer, were designated “wise.” Those who did not were “foolish.” They each had to B.Y.O.O. Bring your own oil. Enough to last no matter how long it took.

That brings us to the major truth of this story. In fact, it is the major truth of all three of our Biblical texts.

Observation #1: A GREAT TRUTH TO REMEMBER

Matthew 25:6 reveals that truth:

*At midnight the cry rang out: “Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!”
(Matthew 25:6)*

Here comes the Groom! In wedding ceremonies today we celebrate the arrival of the Bride, but in that culture it was the Groom’s arrival that started the festivities.

It is clear the Groom is a picture of Jesus. Jesus is talking about that day when He will return to claim His Bride, the church. We see that truth echoed in the reading from 1 Thessalonians 4:

For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. (1 Thessalonians 4:14)

One of the most certain truths of all of Holy Scripture is that Jesus is coming again. Will it be in my lifetime? I don’t know. Will it happen 100 years from now? I don’t know. Like the bridesmaids waiting at the Bride’s house, we don’t know when the Groom will arrive but we know He will. That is a truth we need to proclaim loudly and clearly.

- May I offer you a suggestion? In a few moments when we recite the Apostles’ Creed, could I suggest you really emphasize the word “will” when we say the sentence, “He **will** come again to judge the living and dead.”

Don’t lose that! It is not a pipedream, not wishful thinking. It is a truth to remember.

But it is not the reality of His coming that gets us into trouble. It is the period of waiting. Like those five foolish bridesmaids, we become distracted when the waiting is long. They did. So distracted that they were unprepared when the Groom came.

- Speaking from my experience as the father of two brides, I think they were busy pinning home decorating ideas on Pinterest or watching episodes of “Say Yes to the Dress.” But the bottom line is they weren’t ready when it was time to celebrate.

Life is filled with distractions. Certainly this year of 2020 has been filled with distractions.

- In one blog I read a week ago the writer refused to set his clock back one hour because he was not about to give this year sixty more minutes to do something awful!

But even in a year without all that we have experienced this year, life is filled with potential distractions that can easily draw us away from the things that matter most. Even good distractions. We can in our own minds justify those distractions, but nonetheless, they distract us from being ready for the coming of Christ.

While we wait, there is a truth to remember. There is also ...

Observation #2: A DANGER TO AVOID

I take you to the Amos text for this observation, where we read this haunting question:

Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light—pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness? (Amos 5:20)

Amos does not deny the return of the Lord. Not at all! He too is certain that it is coming. But he knows that for many of those listening to his voice, that day will not be a good day. It is a day of darkness, without a ray of bright light.

Why? Because the people to whom he was speaking were only going through the motions of faith. Their faith had no depth. They were going through the motions of religion, doing all the right stuff. But their lives had not been transformed by faith they were proclaiming.

According to the list Amos provides, these people were singing praises to God, playing harp music, bringing sacrifices, assembling themselves together. But the rest of the week was a different story.

These "religious people" were indistinguishable from the pagans around them the other six days. Amos issues a challenge to them, a verse that was a favorite of Dr. Martin Luther King:

But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! (Amos 5:24)

We all have encountered people who profess the name of Christ but can't be trusted to operate in a way that pleases Him.

- It used to be popular for businesses to include an "ichthus" emblem in their advertising. The intent is to identify themselves as a Christian business. I cannot say I have always had great experiences with those businesses, so much so that I am always a little bit leery if I see that emblem.
- Pastor Powell like to tell the story about reading a bumper sticker that said "Honk if you love Jesus." So he honked. The driver rolled down his window and returned a one-finger salute.

For as long as there has been a realm of faith, there have been people who put on a good show on Sundays and live for the devil the rest of the week. This is a danger to

avoid, says Amos. Such people should not expect to be celebrating when the Groom comes.

One writer expressed it beautifully when she said:

Christianity is less about a building you visit on Sunday mornings. It's about how you live your life every day of the week. Choose to reflect Christ in all you do. Don't just say you are a believer. Prove that you are with your words, your priorities, and your actions.

There is a truth to remember, a danger to avoid and ...

Observation #3: AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO RECEIVE

We go to 1 Thessalonians:

Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

In every generation there are people who know the truth and who live by the truth, yet live daily with a lack of assurance about their eternal destiny.

- When that trumpet sounds, they ask, how do I know which way I will go?

There is a cemetery not far from Windsor Castle in England. The inscription on of the headstones reads:

Pause, my friend, as you walk by;
As you are now, so once was I.
As I am now, so you will be.
Prepare, my friend, to follow me!

An unknown visitor read that inscription and added these lines:

To follow you is not my intent,
Until I know which way you went!

The Scriptures make it very clear which way you will go:

*For if you publicly declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will experience salvation...
Everyone who believes in him will never be disappointed. (Romans 10:9, 11, TPT)*

There is no need to be uncertain.

This is the true testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life has its source in his Son. Whoever has the Son has eternal life; whoever does not have the Son does not possess eternal life. (1 John 5:11-12, TPT)

Words of encouragement that need to be shared.

APPLICATION

Hold onto this truth ... JESUS IS COMING AGAIN!

One of the old hymns I remember singing as a child says this:

There's a great day coming, A great day coming,
There's a great day coming by and by,
When the saints and the sinners shall be parted right and left.
Are you ready for that day to come?

There's a bright day coming, a bright day coming,
There's a bright day coming by and by
But its brightness shall only come to them that love the Lord.
Are you ready for that day to come?

If you are not ready, you can become ready today. Pray with me these words.

Amen.