

Preparing the Oil

Matthew 25:1-13

November 8, 2020

We are people waiting for Christ to return to earth. Expecting the second coming has been a part of Christian tradition since the very beginning. Do you know that of the 27 books in the New Testament, 21 mention the second coming of Christ?

What do you expect to happen when Christ returns to earth? Some think there will be the end of the world and a great cosmic disaster and God will destroy everything and everyone except a small number of people God would save. From my point of view, that idea is not theologically sound and healthy.

God created the world and claimed it good. (Genesis 1) God created human beings on the sixth day and said with joy, "it is very good." (Genesis 1:31) God loves the world and everyone and everything in it. Yes, God does not want to destroy the world but to restore it and make things right. There will be a new heaven and a new earth for all the creation (Revelation 21:1) Yes, the second coming of Christ will be God's glorious and gracious upper-story to be revealed. So we, Christians keep waiting for it with high expectation.

But to be honest, waiting for Christ to return is not an active part of many Christians who live in the 21st century, including us. One reason might be because we have been waiting too long for more than 2000 years and his return does not seem to happen sometime soon. And the longer the delay, the easier it is to lose hope that he will ever return at all.

Another reason might be all the discouraging and alarming news in the world we hear. They make us wonder more about the second coming of Christ and even make us lose hope that he will ever return at all.

To mention a few, the Covid-19 pandemic that has turned everything and everyone and every nation upside down does not seem to disappear soon. Many lost lives and many suffer.

Wars among nations and tribes never stop on earth. Resulting from them, many refugees wander around the world, searching for a new home.

Climate change is another global issue that the world face now. Frequent hurricanes and wildfires have been annual alarming activities.

With news such as these, it is pretty easy to lose heart, grow discouraged and give up hope. We pray, “Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.” But God’s kingdom seems no closer today than it did yesterday or last month or last year.

But the Bible keeps encouraging us to “walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7) and have faith in that “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again,” as we say in our Communion service. The challenge we face is how to live our lives in the meantime.

This morning’s Gospel reading, the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids comes to us as a timely lesson. It urges us to be ready, not only because we do not know when, but also the return of Christ might be delayed.

Back to the parable, you see, the foolish bridesmaids are chastised not because they fail to watch and not because they fall asleep – all of them fall asleep, the wise as well as the foolish. Rather, they are chastised because they did not bring enough lamp oil to keep their lamps burning during the bridegroom’s delay. But look, the wise bridesmaids keep their lamps burning even though the bridegroom is delayed in returning.

So we need ask ourselves today, “Do we keep our lamps burning, like the wise bridesmaids? Do we prepare extra oil to keep our lamps burning?” Do you? Do I?

What does the oil symbolize? In the opinion of Tom Long, professor of preaching at Candler School of Theology at Emory University, it represents “keeping on doing the will of God even when the kingdom is delayed.” I agree his interpretation. Keeping on doing the will of God is a way of keeping extra oil and keeping our lamps burning.

Jesus put it this way, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven (Matt 5:13)

We have been the Paul's letter to Christians in Ephesus in the morning at 8 am last week. Paul encouraged them, saying, "Live as children of light— for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord." (Ephesians 5:8b-10)

So the next question is how we do let our light keep shining? How do we live as children of God? I think and believe that we do it by following the teachings that Jesus taught.

We keep on doing the will of God.. by loving our enemies. "You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,"" said Jesus, "but I say to you, 'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'"

We keep on doing the will of God.. by doing extravagant generosity and kindness, remembering Jesus saying, "if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. (Matt 5:41, 42)

We keep on doing the will of God.. by making peace and reconciliation with others, remembering Jesus' words, "leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift." (Matt 5:24)

We keep on doing the will of, when we live by the golden rule, "doing to others as you would have them do to you." (Matt 7:12)

We keep on doing the will of God.. by respecting and honoring one another in the family, remembering the Word of God from Ephesians, "Children, obey your parents and parents, do not provoke your children." (Ephesians 6:1,4)

We keep on doing the will of God... by loving one another, remembering Jesus saying, "Love one another as I have loved you." (John 13:34)

We keep on doing the will of God... by not serving money, but treating money as a simple tool for living, remembering Jesus' words, "You can not serve both God and wealth. (Matt 6:24)

In short, we become the wise bridesmaids when we wait for Christ returning by keeping on doing the will of God faithfully and intentionally today and tomorrow and now and forever.

In the name of God the Creator, Jesus Christ the Savior and the Holy Spirit the Encourager. Amen.