

“A Gospel of Fear or Hope?”

Matthew 25:1-13

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Matthew 25:1-13

¹Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, “Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.” ⁷Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” ⁹But the wise replied, “No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.” ¹⁰And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, “Lord, lord, open to us.” ¹²But he replied, “Truly I tell you, I do not know you.” ¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Prayer.

Fear.

It is a powerful motivator.

Fear of being unclean

caste out

excluded

left for dead

outside the city walls

facing an eternity of begging

for daily bread.

For centuries

this fear kept the faithful

cooperative

complacent

and compliant

with Jewish law

as defined by the Torah.

But where is the fear now?

Fear is a powerful motivator.

The word “Inquisition”

clangs like swords crossing

flashing images of

kidnapping and disappearances

false accusations

the accused burnt on a stake

before pie-eyed crowds.

Inquisition chills the spine

with sadistic torture

screaming murder

in darkened dungeons

rage kindled by a single word

spoken by demon possessed priests

all with the blessings of

a diseased riddled Church.

But where is the fear now?

Fear is a powerful motivator.

Words of hellfire

and brimstone

have fueled the apocalyptic fires

and rapturous frenzy
of the ignorant and gullible.
Judgment at the hand of
a jealous, vengeful god
empowers the idolatrous belief
that one individual has the Divine power
to damn another
to eternal hell.
Temptation to play trump
and call it "fear"
overcomes even the strongest
and well intentioned
spreading faster than bird flu
to sacristies, altars and pulpits
throughout the land.
But where is the fear now?

Fear is a powerful motivator.
Fear has filled our minds
with images of jet liners
slicing through skyscrapers;
crazed middle easterners
wearing bulky green overcoats
concealing beneath
dynamite strapped to the chest
taking a suicidal stroll
into a crowded marketplace.
Fear has created new layers of government
frantically searching for security
with new budgets to close the borders
and to deploy more troops
even further away from our shores.
Fear has created
long lines at airports
curriculum to teach how to avoid
roadside bombs
and how to armor plate vehicles.
Fear makes fertile the soil that nurtures
an environment where torture
and abuse can thrive.
Fear raises the price of gas
at the first sign of Caribbean clouds.
Fear raises prices
at the first hiccup in the economy
sending pensioners to the poorhouse
workers to the unemployment line
homeowners into foreclosure

and companies into bankruptcy.
What does fear get us?

A gospel based on fear eventually withers under its own weight.¹

Today's gospel
truth spoken from our Savior's lips
suggest that preparedness
is less the result of fear
than it is hope.

Bridesmaids wait and prepare
not for some expected cosmic catastrophe
but for an abundant banquet.
The bridegroom does not come
bearing a sword to combat fear
but with food abundant to be shared.
Like the midwife who births
this parable produces
hope for a hungry world
an invitation to sup
at the gospel feast.
The oil in the bridesmaids lamps
prepares the feast
and illumines the meal
shedding light upon the festival.

Hope does not ask the question
"who is welcome?"
All bridesmaids are welcome.
All are called to be prepared.

Hope opens the door
that leads to hospitality
- gracious hospitality -
a land flowing with milk and honey
a table set with bread and wine
an eternal, heavenly banquet
that is God's abundant, overflowing grace.

Fear is one form of foolishness.
Fear will grab a hold of you
making it nearly impossible

¹ Quote by David H. Jensen, Austin Presbyterian
Theological Seminary, Lectionary Homiletics,
October 2005 November 2005, XVI (6) 50.

to shake it free.
Fear poisons the well of hope.
It makes us inattentive to
the banquet already prepared
in our midst.
It makes us absentminded
leading us to running short
running dry
and running out.

Our story is one of faith and hope.

The ancient father, Irenaeus,
recognizes the hope more than anybody:
Jesus Christ is the One
who gathers together
all of humanity
- it's joy, struggle, history, temptation, sin,
beauty and grace -
bringing the past to completion
redeeming a history of failure
and resurrecting the remnant
to live eternally
in communion with God.

Hope is found
in this bread.
Hope is found
in this wine.
Hope is found
when we gather round the table
and experience anew
communion with one other
and with our God.

Welcome to the banquet
beloved faithful!
I'm delighted to see
you dressed for success!
Trim your lamps and enter in.
Take your place at the table
and let us
partake of the gospel feast.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Thanks be
to God. Amen.