

## **“Pitty the Napping Fool!”**

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### **Matthew 25:1-13**

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But 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.’ And 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. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Prayer.

In the latest edition of the Catholic Courier,<sup>1</sup>

(which I thankfully receive and read each month  
for no other reason than

I must be the recipient of a miraculous subscription)

the main theme is “Focusing on the word of God.”

This is a result of Pope Benedict XVI recent Synod of Bishops  
called to bring a greater focus on scripture.

I've been told that there is value in being fashionably late

but, with all apologies to my many faithful Roman Catholic friends and colleagues,  
500 years late to this party is hardly fashionable.

Inside the story is told how preaching the word needs improvement.

Talking on and on is to be avoided,

a feature of many priests,

and that of St. Paul.

We are told that Paul was preaching in Troas

on the first day of the week

when one of his listeners

- the young lad Eutychus – was sitting on the windowsill listening.

He became drowsier and drowsier

and finally fell asleep.

He fell from the third-story window to his death.

God, through Paul, brought the young boy back to life.

While an occasional person does nod off during my sermons

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<sup>1</sup> Catholic Courier, Diocese of Rochester, NY, November 2008, A7.

Thankfully, I've never had one die on me like St. Paul.  
Here, one who slept, God revived.

Sleep disorder clinics are popping up like mushrooms.  
This may be one reason you see your health premiums skyrocketing.  
Research has been done that reports those who suffer from sleep apnea,  
that is a cessation of breathing during sleep,  
have a significantly higher risk of sudden death, cardio vascular disease, stroke, and  
hypertension.

Thousands of people are being referred by primary care doctors  
to see if this is a problem, and what can be done to stop it.

Noble.

So I find myself sitting in an exam room this past week at a sleep disorder clinic  
answering the nurse practitioner's questions:

Do you fall asleep easily? Yes, who doesn't?

Do you wake rested? Never. Don't mind me; I'm just resting my eyes.

Do you fall asleep while working? Only in front of my computer screen. Don't you?

Ever fall asleep while driving? All the time. But I respond like Mario Andretti.

Are you ever rested? I always figured being chronically tired was a sign of successfully living up  
to the Protestant work ethic.

Boy, do I have news for you.

And so it goes.

To an outsider, one might observe  
that Americans are working longer hours,  
multitasking with greater complexity,  
subjected to increasing financial, family, and stress loads.

We all eat poorly,  
are overweight,  
and don't get enough exercise.

We drink too much,  
party too hard,  
have backslid in our church attendance  
(or stopped all together)  
and can't wait to get home each evening and jump in our jammies.

One might observe that every one of us have  
learned the art of sleepwalking;  
going through life,  
going through the motions,  
but being entirely unconscious.

When is the last time you checked on how much oil is left in your lamp?

Our gospel lesson for this morning is a bucket of cold water in the face

of all of us from mainline, Protestant, social gospel traditions.  
We like being selective in our textual studies.  
So we create this image of God,  
wholly grounded in scripture, mind you,  
of one who forgives, gives second chances, and  
in the end, saves everyone.  
God is love we chant.  
Kom-Ba-Ya we sing,  
and say, Why can't we all just get along?

But today Jesus is telling a parable  
using metaphor  
to clearly and concisely  
communicate the fact that there is more to God than meets the eye.  
God is a judge ... THE judge, in fact.  
Sometimes that judgment results in a door that is permanently shut and sealed.  
And that judgment can come at a moments notice.  
That judgment will come in God's time, not our time.  
Judgment will come  
when one is awake and alert,  
or when one is sleeping.  
"The fairy tale ending we all hope for does not happen in this parable."<sup>2</sup>

One of the most upsetting notion of this gospel lesson is that it only gives one answer to every question it raises:  
When will the judgment come? I don't know, but be ready.  
What is the criteria for this judgment? I can't tell you, but be ready.  
Is is right or wrong, is it the Law from the Bible, and who decides? I don't know, but be ready.  
It hasn't happened in 2,000 years, so why now? Who can say? But be ready.  
Is judgment something that happens at death, or in a big parousia with Jesus swooping down from a cloud? I wish I knew. But be ready.

The community from which this gospel springs forth  
faced many, complicated issues:  
their separation from Judaism, a mixed community of former Jews and gentiles, a delayed parousia, fatigued vigilance, and violence at the hands of Rome.  
In the parable are two types of bridesmaids: those who were prepared, and those who were not.  
When the bridegroom is spotted making his approach,  
(of course, who we are to understand as Jesus)  
those prepared don't pass judgment upon the unprepared,  
they simply tell them to obtain their own supply.  
While they are gone,

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2 Lange, D., Commentary on the Gospel, as found at: [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect\\_date=11/9/2008#](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=11/9/2008#)

the bridegroom arrives  
and welcomes those who were prepared into the wedding banquet  
(which, we are to understand as being the Kingdom of Heaven).  
When the unprepared returned,  
now prepared with a supply of oil,  
it is too late,  
and they are shut out for good.  
Pity the poor fool who naps and is unprepared.  
Keep awake therefore, Jesus concludes,  
for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Be ready, is the only possible reply to Jesus.  
Some might say, being ready means doing good works. That this is the way one prepares for the Kingdom of Heaven. Which is to say, we are judged as righteous by our good works.  
Others might say, being ready means pumping up your faith. That this is the way one prepares for the return of the bridegroom. Simply having faith that Christ can save you will result in being welcomed into the wedding feast.  
Indeed, scriptural evidence could be accumulated to support both of these perspectives.  
But, I would suggest that being ready is all this and more.  
I would suggest that being ready requires that cross of Jesus Christ be in the center of the community we keep.

The holy possession of the cross (as Luther calls the seventh mark of the church) is not really a possession (as if we "owned" the cross or some special access to God). It is a life that is characterized by choices that make it clear God is the actor and the giver of life. In Luther's words, a community that is characterized by the holy possession of the cross is a community that knows suffering: "They must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh (as the Lord's Prayer indicates) by inward sadness, timidity, fear, outward poverty, contempt, illness, and weakness, in order to become like their head, Christ." This description hardly fits what we would imagine under the nomenclature "wise young women," yet in the context of Matthew's Gospel, this is precisely the suggestion.

Those who are enduring misfortune, even poverty, for Christ's sake are not the one who will be quick to judge others. Judgment is now purely reserved for God who alone knows or recognizes each individual. Grace is in the cross that lets shine forth a light, a light so unique that people do not praise our good works but rather praise God who is acting and giving life in the midst of suffering, life in the midst of death, opening the door to those who have engaged the way of the cross, who have engaged the way of death. The world cannot understand this way. It does not recognize the Lord though it continually cries out, "Lord, Lord!"<sup>3</sup>

Pity the napping fool who is unprepared.

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3 Ibid.

Don't wander through life aimlessly, sleepwalking through the daily grind.  
Place the cross in the center of your life.  
Connect with the community, and come out of your isolation.  
Lift up the cross, and embrace it for what Christ has done for you.  
Keep awake therefore, Jesus concludes,  
keep awake.  
Amen.