

Active Waiting
Matthew 25:1-13
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Oct 8, 2023
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

There is a lot going on here in today's parable. And, let's name it right up front: some of it disturbs us.

Many hear this parable and feel like they don't recognize Jesus. After all, we've come to understand the bridegroom as Jesus, yet we don't know Jesus as one who would lock others out and not open the door.

Many hear this parable and wonder about the young women who had brought flasks of oil. Why didn't they share with those who ran out? Aren't we taught to share? Did they want to see the others fail?

Many hear this parable and just aren't sure what to do with this concept of keeping awake and waiting for the day and the hour of Jesus' arrival. Most of us, two thousand years later, have an understanding of faith that is much more focused on the difference we can make in the here and now than it is on waiting for some cataclysmic end time.

So, what do we do with this?

Well, there are certainly some things that we might be well served to remember about the context, both around Jesus and also around the community of Christians for whom Matthew was recording this story.

After all, all of those people would have understood middle eastern wedding traditions of the day. They would have known that the bride and her family and friends would gather together and wait for the arrival of the groom and his entourage. They would have known that it was not unusual for that large group to arrive late into the evening or even in the middle of the night. They would have known that the two groups together would then set off, often immediately upon the groom's arrival, to the site of the wedding festivities. They would have known all this and known that anyone waiting for the bridegroom would have had plenty of oil with them ("Involved Waiting" sermon exegesis written by Eric Jackson for *Because of YOU Our Church Changes Lives* stewardship material, 37).

And within the community of Christians around Matthew, let's remember that they were doing their own wrestling with when Jesus would return. It had taken longer than they ever imagined. Meanwhile, this Jewish Christian community had watched as the temple had fallen, as their Jewish siblings were being persecuted, as Christianity was spreading to more and more Gentiles, and in the midst of all of this the divide between Christianity and Judaism was deepening. *And* it was simply hard to remain vigilant. It was hard to live a commitment to Jesus' ways with the same fervor they once had. That's not an ancient problem...we know that feeling, too.

So there is a lot going on. We could spend a long time talking about all of these things and more. And there are times and places for that.

Meanwhile, as David Hudson reminded us in Bible Study when we discussed this text a couple weeks ago, there are often a lot of things going on in a parable, a lot of little details that distract us from the main point.

So, what *are* we to hear?

Because just as the disciples were anxious about what the future held and wondering about how they would know, what signs they might see to indicate what they needed to know...so, too, we get anxious. With wars and rumors of war...with climate change and the ways that is already impacting our lives...with political systems that we had put faith in becoming less stable...with racism and antisemitism and sexism and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments on the rise...in the midst of all of this, we know what it is to be anxious about the future.

And meanwhile, we are not told to give up. We are not even told to just sit back and wait and let God take care of it. Rather, we are invited to engage actively. "Jesus is advocating active waiting that involves action" (Jackson, 38).

As New Testament Professor Matthew L. Skinner writes, "Christian faith involves waiting with confidence....Such a life is marked by active waiting as we expect God to make all things new. It's more like eagerly expecting and diligently preparing in anticipation of your future graduation than it is like waiting silently in line to get through the TSA checkpoint at the airport" ([Since We Have to Wait, We'd Better Get to Work \(Matthew 25:1-13\) | HuffPost Religion](#)).

So, how *do* we wait actively? What *are* we called to do in this already/not yet time when we trust that God's kin-dom *has* been ushered in, but we know it is not fully revealed?

What if our waiting isn't a time to just keep ourselves comfortable with the assurance that God loves us, but also a time to step out into the world with the proclamation that God's love is abundant and is for all?

What if our waiting isn't a time to keep accumulating for ourselves, but a time to work for justice so that everyone has enough?

Eric Jackson poses these questions, "Could it be that the proper thing is waiting with generous actions of love? Could it be [found] when the hungry [person] who has had every door closed to them finds abundance through the generosity of a stranger from a church? Could it be found when the teenager who is about to commit suicide because they realize they are same gender loving and their family shunned them finds sanctuary in the home of a member of our church, when they least expect a home? Could it be that your giving, your generosity to the church provides such oil that the church demonstrates acts of mercy, justice, compassion, and love?" (Jackson, 38).

Friends, over the coming weeks we are going to be talking about how we together can wait in ways that continue the work of Jesus, ways that cause us to be actively engaged

in bringing about God's kin-dom. We are going to be talking about how each of us has a role in this, how each of us has things we can give - time and talents and financial offerings - so that we can do this work together. And we are going to be reminding ourselves that we don't do this work just for us...but in order to change lives, in order to shine the light of God's love out into our world.

Because of you, we at First Christian continue to share a message of God's extravagant love.

Because of you, we at First Christian continue to show up and speak out against bigotry and prejudice.

Because of you, we at First Christian continue to find new ways to connect and in doing so our reach expands.

Because of you, we at First Christian continue to respond to the needs of people in our community.

Because of you, we don't get overwhelmed with the waiting, but continue to live actively in this world, believing that together we can change lives. May it be so.