



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost, November 8, 2020

Soon Come!

by Garland F. Pierce

Matthew 25:1-13

25:1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

25:2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

25:3 When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them;

25:4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

25:5 As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept.

25:6 But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'

25:7 Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps.

25:8 The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'

25:9 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.'

25:10 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.

25:11 Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.'

25:12 But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.'

25:13 Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

*I want to be ready!
I want to be ready!
I want to be ready to walk in Jerusalem just like John!*

The enslaved people of African descent sang this determination in the midst of a midnight that was dehumanizing, often painful, and filled with cruelty and death that could come at any moment. To the oppressors, the lives of these singers only had worth as far as the labor they could render or the price they could fetch on the auction block. Yet they sang of a spiritual readiness for an ultimate divine encounter and of a focus on the now and the next.

At the writing of this meditation, the world waits for the final results of the US presidential election and like the bridegroom in the text, the results are slow to come—at the same time, not yet and at any minute. This is a familiar tension in life that we all know so well—at the same time, not yet and at any minute.

Similarly in Jamaica, there is that wonderfully hopeful, laid back, ambiguous expression, “Soon come.” “It means, ‘it will come,’ and that could literally mean soon, eventually, next week, soon enough, or it might mean that enough time will pass such that you’ll forget you were waiting for something.”¹ It is that very last part that is so dangerous in life, particularly the life of faith—to forget that you are waiting or for what you are waiting. Missed opportunities are real. Though we believe that God’s grace does abound, there is the reality that some doors do close, sometimes it is too late.

Perhaps this is why this parable is an uncomfortable one. Wise virgins unwilling to share and an unforgiving and LATE bridegroom refusing to allow late entry to others are features that do not quite sit well in our spirits. However, above all it is tension between not yet and at any minute, “soon come” that makes us feel aimless and distracted. Drowsiness is inevitable while idly waiting; all ten virgins are witnesses to this. Even the lack of preparation or the miscalculation of how much oil would be needed may not be the worse of the foolish virgins’ mistakes. Forgetting how to wait and for what you are waiting perhaps is their greater sin. Forgetting their purpose got them in trouble. Knowing your purpose informs how you wait and what you prioritize. Their purpose was to greet the bridegroom and to participate in the procession, whether with fully lit, dimly lit, or empty lamps. When they left, they missed. Their priority was not the lamp but the bridegroom and the procession. Their purpose was to bear witness to the bridegroom’s coming.

We pray that by the time many read this, the US presidential election results will be known and confirmed; but, we know they “soon come.” “Kings and kingdoms will all pass away;” our calling while we wait is clear. In Matthew, we know we are called to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and imprisoned. We are called to witness to God’s love and liberation to and for the least and the last. We are called to go, teach, preach, march, and bear witness. This parable is a warning to not lose focus on our purpose and

¹ <https://twoyearsponderock.wordpress.com/2014/06/04/soon-come/>

our priorities. To do so might cause us to miss bearing witness to Jesus' presence among us for he "soon come."

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share (write down)—How do you stay focused and ready? What areas of your life need extra oil?

PRAY:

God of holy anticipation, you have promised that you would return at a time unknown to us. Make us ready, so that when you return we might be welcomed into your kingdom with open arms. We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
AMEN

From https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3871

ACT:

1. Based on your reflections from the TALK section, make a plan to get the oil you need NOW. How will you keep your purpose and priorities in front of you so you will not forget or get distracted? For everyone, advocate and be a witness to others by practicing social distancing as much as possible, wash your hands often, and wear face covering to help prevent the spread of COVID-19—See: <http://www.amechealth.org>.

2. See also the activity that accompanies this devotion.

3. Revisit the Psalm 23 Challenge first issued as part of the March 22, 2020 set of resources.

Song:

My Soul, Be on Thy Guard
AMEC Hymnal, #376

1. My soul, be on thy guard;
Ten thou-sand foes a-rise;
The hosts of sin are press-ing hard
To draw thee from the skies.
2. O watch and fight and pray;
The bat-tle ne'er give o'er;
Re-new it bold-ly ev-ery day,
And help di-vine im-plore.
3. Ne'er think the vic-tory won,
Nor lay thine ar-mor down;

Thine ar-duous work will not be done
Till thou ob-tain the crown.

4. Fight on, my soul, till death
Shall bring thee to thy God;
He'll take thee, at thy part-ing breath,
To His di-vine a-bode. A-men.

Alternative Song: *Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning*, arranged and conducted by Dr. Andre Thomas: <https://youtu.be/6HDQqM7TsLU>

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



The Christian Education Department will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.