

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST
“And So We Wait”
Matthew 25:1-13

Let's face it, we don't like waiting. I know I don't and my guess is that you don't either. We live in an “instant” society, we want what we want and we want it right now! And yet, the fact is that, as one man once characterized his time in the army to me, we “hurry up and wait.” We wait for this and we wait for that. I suppose we wait, even though we don't like it, because deep down inside we figure whatever it is we're waiting for is, in the end, worth it.

Our Gospel lesson for today contains a parable about waiting. It tells us the story of ten virgins waiting for a bridegroom to come. You see, in those days, it was the custom for the bride and groom to be betrothed, in a way like our modern day engagement, and then, after some time had elapsed, the bridegroom would come to the home of the bride for the wedding feast and, in that, the consummation of the wedding. Anyway, these ten virgins were undoubtedly friends of the bride and so they went out to the bride's home to wait for the bridegroom to come and for the wedding feast to begin. According to one commentator, the number ten is significant because in Hebrew culture it denotes completeness. He says that's reflected in the Ten Commandments recorded in Exodus, the ten talents spoken of by Jesus in Matthew, and the ten pieces of silver, the ten servants, and the ten cities spoken of in Luke. Thus, he says, the ten virgins represent the Church which is filled with wise and foolish people.

The meaning of the parable is simple. The bridegroom is Christ and his coming to consummate his wedding with his bride is his second coming. The ten virgins represent all of the followers of Christ throughout the ages. And the waiting is what we are called to do as we look forward to his coming again.

This parable is the fifth of seven parables Jesus spoke concerning the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 24 and 25. All seven, including this one, speak to the same thing – Christ is coming again and when he comes he will bring the fullness of the kingdom with him for those who believe and the fullness of judgment for those who don't and because he's coming, we need to be prepared.

But how do we prepare for such a thing? How do we wait? Now there is waiting and then there is waiting. There's the impatient waiting that is made up of twiddling thumbs and tapping toes, a waiting that is passive. It's a waiting that “kills time” and drags on and on. It's the kind of waiting we do at the doctor's office or in the grocery store checkout line.

There is however, another form of waiting. Picture if you will a pregnant woman. Her pregnancy becomes a time of expectant waiting that demands both patience and preparation and requires an acceptance of what is and a hope for what will be. Unable to speed up or slow down the process, it's a time to live with the reality of the already but not yet. For the woman who is "with child" the baby who is within her is already "her child." It's real. It's life. And yet it's not fully hers. It grows and develops within her, needing her for its growth and life. Throughout the nine month pregnancy inward preparations abound. The mother's body works and adjusts to meet the needs of that baby's life, a baby that she will deliver into the world. Outward preparations are made as well. The nursery is furnished with the crib and a rocking chair. It's supplied with toys and diapers and everything a baby needs. This kind of waiting is active.

So it is with us. We are called to wait for the coming of Christ actively not passively. Like the pregnant woman with her baby living within, so the kingdom of God already lives within the hearts and lives of those who believe. The kingdom is not something which is yet to come, it's already here in Christ. And yet we wait for the fullness of that kingdom when Christ comes again. It is, as one of my seminary professors used to say, a matter of "the now and the not yet."

Our waiting is not for something we don't already have. Rather it is the waiting for the fulfillment of something we already have. Christ made us His own through His life, death and resurrection. Having accomplished his purpose here on earth he ascended back to His Father in heaven but not before promising to come again to take all who are His home to be with Him forever in heaven.

It's a matter of faith. The five foolish virgins were foolish because they "ran out of faith." They didn't plan for the long haul. They thought the baby was coming today. They weren't prepared to wait nine months. The five wise virgins were wise because they were prepared with enough faith for the long haul. They knew the baby was coming and they were prepared to wait nine months.

If faith is a gift, and it is, then growth in faith is a gift as well and its growth in faith that keeps us prepared. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. So also, growth in faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. That Word comes to us in Scripture and in the Sacraments and as we faithfully make use of Scripture and the Sacraments we continue to grow in faith and, in that, are empowered to remain steadfast to the end.

As we enter that time of the church year when we are called to look forward to the return of Christ even as we prepare to celebrate His first coming, may we wait, not passively but actively, for the fulfillment of that which has already been planted in us – the kingdom of heaven.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.