

**Davidson College Presbyterian Church**  
**Davidson, North Carolina**  
**Julia Burkley**  
**“The Waiting Game”**  
**Matthew 25:1-13**  
**November 12, 2017**  
**9:45 a.m.**

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I love the difficult passages in the Bible, the passages that force us to think about our place in the world and think about social justice and how we can best better lives of those around us and fix things. Those are the ones that fit my personality of wanting to make big changes constantly, and challenge preexisting external structures. Bible passages that I stay away from are ones that talk about inward reflection, the Second Coming, and *especially* parables. So when I saw the lectionary passage for this week, I internally groaned. Matthew 25 is exactly the kind of passage I stay away from, one that I don't want to pretend exists because I'm not comfortable holding it and studying it. Parables don't give you immediate gratification; but the more that I challenged myself to have patience and take this parable slowly, the more I realized it had an important message to share, one that is directly applicable to where all of us are in our lives. The active patience that I had to have while piecing apart this text is exactly what this parable is teaching: this is a passage about patience and waiting for the second of coming of Christ, but one that goes deeper and teaches us how to actively live in that anticipation. Set during Jesus' sermon to his disciples at the Mount of Olives, this particular parable is about how we should wait for the Parousia- a fancy word for the second coming. Jesus begins his Sermon on the Mount of Olives with an extended description of what happens at end of the age in Matthew 24. He describes the wars, destruction, and chaos that will occur before right before he returns. Only after those descriptions does Jesus turn to actual instructions for how we as humans can live until his time comes.

That's where this parable of the bridesmaids comes in.

*Let us pray: Holy Spirit, open our minds and hearts to hear your word; quiet all of our thoughts anxieties and worries, and allow us to listen to where you are guiding us in this scripture as we wait. Amen.*

Listen now to the word of the Lord.

Jesus said, “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids<sup>a</sup> took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.<sup>b</sup> <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; <sup>4</sup> but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. <sup>6</sup> But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ <sup>7</sup> Then all those bridesmaids<sup>c</sup> got up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ <sup>9</sup> 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.’ <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Later the other bridesmaids<sup>d</sup> came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ <sup>12</sup> But Jesus replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ <sup>13</sup> Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.<sup>e</sup> The word of the Lord.

### **The Waiting Game**

I want to start by asking you to take a second to think about a time that you were impatient about something coming, perhaps something small, like a letter from a friend, or something big like an acceptance to a job, or the birth of a child.

Picture one moment of anticipation of change in your life. Sit with it. What emotions are you feeling? Are you excited? Nervous?

So often, these moments of anticipation are around times of change, of when one part of our life is making room for a new chapter. **Anticipation is a liminal space itself, an in-between, defined by both the past and the future, but not quite being either.** Anticipation is exciting, but also terrifying because it is a space in unknown change.

I can give you my moment that I would think about: I am a fall semester senior in college. I know that come May, I will have graduated and moved on to the next chapter of my life. The exhaustion comes from the fact that I don't yet know where I will go next. I am dutifully filling out application after application, attempting to start defining the next part of my identity, and so ready to have figured out what that will be. but I have to wait, because I know the time for me to know hasn't yet come.

Just like the waiting we are participate in in many parts of our lives, we as a Christian Church as a whole have been in a state of waiting for centuries. This state of waiting for Jesus is a waiting for our full identity as Christians to be realized in the Kingdom of Heaven. We have been waiting for a *long* time. The early Christians believed that the second coming was coming soon, but time came, and then passed, and then continued to pass, without any Jesus, without any new kingdom of God. We are still in this ultimate waiting game, waiting for Jesus to come again, but also living our lives as people on this Earth.

We all have times where a big decision or answer doesn't come when we thought, or wished, it would. Think back to the time that you thought of at the beginning of this sermon: We wait with a bated breath for an email or a phone call. . . . And it doesn't come. We are stuck in not only excited anticipation, but also impatience and frustration. Of wishing we could *will* the next step into creation, whilst knowing we really don't have any jurisdiction or power to do that.

This Parable in Mathew 25 does what parables do best and attempts to explain this large concept of waiting for the ultimate change in the coming of Jesus. The bridesmaids in this story are also in a moment of anticipation. The ten of them are waiting with bated breath for the bridegroom to come so they can welcome him and begin the celebration. All of them have dutifully prepared lamps of oil so they can wait for him with light.

Piecing apart the allegory, the waiting bridesmaids represent the members of the Church, while the bridegroom they are waiting for is Jesus. This story represents church members, who desperately want Jesus to come so they can celebrate the second coming and the incredibly exciting realized Kingdom of God.

**In this parable, the bridegroom, like Jesus, doesn't arrive when expected.** We as Christians wait, we prepare.

### **How are we instructed to live in that space of waiting?**

This first lesson the bridesmaids teach us is that we have to live in active patience, balancing both preparedness and ease. These wise bridesmaids have not over prepared on material items, they have not stockpiled food, water and drink, hoarding preparations to themselves while they anxiously await the arrival of the bridegroom. They have simply brought enough oil to wait for him. With knowledge of preparedness, they are able to go sleep soundly, knowing that whenever the bridegroom returns, they'll be prepared to accept him. Think about what you need to sleep: safety, calmness, and ease of mind. That's certainly not easy. Yet, even with the anticipation of the coming of the bridegroom, the women are still able to be calm of mind and rest as they wait for his coming.

**This is important: Those who are prepared are content and at ease with their readiness.** At ease enough to sleep, at ease enough to live our lives and go about the day to day. We will still have to do errands, do homework, cook dinner. The bridesmaids show us that we have to live, but live in a loyalty to who we are waiting for. The bridesmaids don't abandon the groom when it takes longer than expected.

A second lesson that the bridesmaids give us is that we aren't supposed to wait alone. It is vital to surround ourselves with council, community, and friends, to support and walk down God's journey with us. What are communities that you find support you? For me, it has been the Chaplain's Office here, UKirk, and my amazing classmates. This parable shows that in a godly life, we must surround ourselves with people that will wait with us through all types of anticipations, people and peers that we know we can call at the drop of a hat to talk through next steps, and people that will help us live faithfully.

The people in your life are important and are part of God's calling. In this story there are 10 bridesmaids, 5 said to be "foolish", and 5 said to be "wise". I struggled with my own interpretations of this story: it's easy to put

judgment on the foolish, say that they could have done more. But I couldn't shake an unease about that interpretation.

An article by Dirk G. Lange from Working Preacher, part of Lutheran Seminary made me realize where that unease was coming from. Thinking about the "foolish" and the "wise" in this story didn't fit with the larger understanding of Christ's loves. Lange picks this apart. To quote Dr. Lange: *"The young women were all waiting for the bridegroom. Both the foolish and the wise all belonged to the same community, the same group of friends. They all fall asleep waiting for the bridegroom to come. Within the community, it is impossible to tell who has enough oil in their lamps, who has been more faithful. This is not for us to see or to judge. The church remains always a mixed community."*

God does not call us as humans to judge. The 'wise' women don't yet know they are wise, and the 'foolish' don't yet know they are foolish. They are part of an equal community, living with each other in the waiting and trying to live faithfully. Together, the bridesmaids show us that we live a faithful life with all those around us, knowing that in the end of the story, it is only the bridegroom, Jesus, who has the power to judge, not either group of bridesmaids, not anyone of us. Judgment is only reserved for God who recognizes each person intimately. In God's knowing is an ultimate grace, a grace that allows God to know the lives of each person, and opens the door of the kingdom to anyone who acts in a Godly way. **We are not called to live in the waiting of the second coming judging others around us.**

We don't know when Jesus is coming back. We don't know what that will mean for us. All we know is that we have the gift to **live right now** in a way that honors our Creator and is filled with community and faith in knowing that God will come back. Instead of living in impatience for next steps, we should embrace the excitement about the coming of the new parts of life and the coming of God's Kingdom.

**As you wait, surround yourself with community to live your life faithfully and actively, knowing that eventually, God will return.**

Amen.