

32nd Sunday A (Matt 25:1-13)

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," so says a familiar adage. And the truth of it is hard to deny. We've learned this lesson in some of the most vital areas of life. It's easier to prevent children from contracting polio than it is to cure them of it. It's easier to prevent tooth decay by brushing and flossing than it is to face a dentist with his horrible drill. It's easier to keep a marriage healthy by communicating well, or by making a Marriage Encounter, or a Retrouvaille for troubled marriages. A consistent program of preventive maintenance, like getting your oil changed as scheduled, or your timing belt changed as required before the engine destroys itself, can eliminate major automobile repairs. And it's certainly less expensive.

In today's Gospel from Matthew, Jesus applies this same concept to our religious faith. He told a story about ten bridesmaids. Theirs was a fairly simple role. They were to meet the groom with burning lamps and escort him to the wedding. Parishes often have a lot of scheduled marriages. In our Gospel, the catch was that nobody knew exactly when the groom would appear. Rarely does the groom arrive late; sometimes it's the bride. Our story says nothing about the bride, so maybe times were different then. There were probably no traffic delays. In this story, the groom arrived about midnight. Five of the bridesmaids were prepared and five weren't, for their lamps had burned out and they had no fuel oil. The moral of this story is to hold ourselves in conscious anticipation of the coming of the Lord Jesus into our lives. To be ready and alert to the Lord in our lives is true wisdom, for it is the wise who see with new eyes and respond with a new and generous heart.

There are some people, perhaps you may have met some, who in their pseudo wisdom decline involvement in living their Christian lives, not because they consider it unwise or nonsensical, but because they regard it as hopelessly idealistic. They may admit that the teachings of Christ are good and beautiful, but they doubt that there is any place for them in this world. Loving and forgiving your enemies can be an interesting topic for a theological discussion, but when translated into living it out in one's life, this piece of wisdom can be rejected as unworkable, impractical or too idealistic. Actually, the dismissal of the wisdom of loving and forgiving those we are at odds with is often based on fear, the fear of being known for who we are by another, and the fear of being rejected once we are known. Such fear of loving and forgiving can damage and stunt a marriage relationship, for example, or can prevent the growth and development of a vital, caring community. Loving and forgiving your enemies would be considered out of place in the highly competitive business world by those who hold this teaching of the Lord Jesus as hopelessly idealistic, and no nation had better use it as a guideline for foreign policy. A lovely sentiment, some would say, but hopelessly idealistic.

Our call as Christians is to seek out wisdom, to see with new eyes, and to risk loving with a new heart, always being ready to forgive. In this is not only wisdom, but our salvation in the Lord Jesus who laid down his very life for us in his astounding, forgiving love. And so we give thanks for this gift of himself as we watch for his coming. Amen.

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