

Don't Miss It

November 8, 2020, 23rd Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Rev. Adrienne M. Meier

St. Thomas Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Indiana

Text: Matthew 25:1-13

Ten young people were out on the town, the hottest ticket in their pockets and plans to Uber to the theater. Dinner and drinks at the end of a long work day were in order. Phones came out and selfies taken, social media scrolled, dog pictures shared. By the end of dinner, ten phones were dead. Five chargers came out, and, but ten phones cannot be charged with five charges, so, bewilderingly, five tired feet tromped home for chargers. And, then, off to the theater, but - too late - the show had started, late seating was not allowed. They had the hottest ticket in town, but they didn't make it. When they asked for a few minutes with a charger, they could have asked for a ride. When they took the long walk home, they could have walked to the theater. They were unprepared and distracted. In a rash moment, they thought the most important thing was a charged iPhone, but the most important thing was to see the show. We, too, are distracted and unprepared for the kin-dom of God — we're grasping for whatever we think for the kin-dom of God, but our task is to show up and be present to bear witness to both the pain of this world, and to God's in-breaking reign.

It is so hard to hear about the five bridesmaids who never made it into the party. We want God's party to be a raucous, the-more-the-merrier, everybody's-welcome kind of invitation. But there are things we might be tempted to do that are outside of God's kin-dom. In fact there is a lot of stuff we're tempted to do that is outside of God's kin-dom, outside of God's will for us and for all of humanity. It is sin. There is no place for sin in the kin-dom of God. The bridesmaids were unprepared and distracted. And, in truth, so are we. We are sinners. We prioritize our own physical and emotional safety while our siblings in Christ sleep on the streets, while they are harassed by those who are supposed to keep them safe, and while God's beloved are refused their basic and fundamental human rights. We hoard the good gifts that are made to be shared. And, if that's the case, the only difference between the wise and foolish bridesmaids wasn't the oil some brought and some forgot, but that the wise stayed to get into the party. The foolish bridesmaids doubled down - unprepared and distracted, they went in search of oil. They thought they could secure - buy, obtain - entrance to the party, but they way to get into party was to stay with the light and come in with the bridegroom. They stopped waiting at the critical moment. It would have been great if they had the extra oil, but it really wasn't about the oil, it was always about getting to the party. Jesus Christ is the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome. Our task isn't to bring the light. Our task is to follow the bridegroom to the party. Do not get distracted.

A few years ago, Matt's annual conference of communication scholars was in Las Vegas. Having never been, I tagged along. Having young children at home, that time change and long flight were *brutal*, and, in the end, we mostly slept. The last night, though, was what we were most excited about. Matt had booked tickets to see the magicians Penn and Teller. And one of the things that is really cool about them is that they often explain their tricks. And what you'll learn is that the trick often happens before you even know what the trick is. So, long before you're looking for the prestidigitation, the trick has already happened. They don't say, "Pick a card. Now I will find your card. Oh, look a bunny!" And then they find your card while you've looked away. While they're cleaning up the last trick, while they're doing their folksy segue to the next trick, they distract you before the trick has really even begun, when you're not even thinking about a trick

That is the kind of distraction we should keep alert for. It isn't the obvious sin, but the unobvious sin. The sin that we commit when we think we're being righteous. Luther is pretty famous for this, right? He takes a commandment like, "Thou shalt not murder," one most of us have fully in hand, right? And he says this means, "We are to fear and love God, so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, but..." and here's the kicker, "instead help and support them in all of life's needs." Have you helped and supported all of your neighbors, even the ones you don't agree with? Have we not sat idly by while refugees were refused the safety and security of entrance to our country? Have we not demanded cheap, plastic products without a care for the conditions of those who manufacture them? The great distraction, I think, is, in the words of Peter Steinke, that we prefer "peace...over justice." We want to just "get along," even if it means some of us have everything we need while others suffer.

As I write this, votes are being tabulated, but still we wait. By the time my words reach you, I predict we will be looking at a world changed in some way or another. What do we do in the wake of contentious election? The meme parade of social media urges kindness. I value kindness - we, as Christians, value kindness - but we also value justice. We value peace, but we must acknowledge that there is not peace for me unless there is peace for we. The grammar stinks there, but I hope you'll agree the sentiment is right on. Dag Hammarskjold said, "No peace which is not peace for all, no rest until all has been fulfilled." Our job isn't to rest on our laurels, drinking to our victory or mourning our defeat. The task to be present to the pain of this world. My friend Claire Haas, who is a community organizer and anti-racist coach, wrote this week about the difference between keeping someone at a distance and keeping boundaries. We think that distancing ourselves from others protects us, but really it just hurts them. Keeping boundaries and holding the space for others to grow is very different. We did not all vote for the same candidates, and, yes, we can be kind to one another, but we can also listen very carefully and deeply to the hurt and pain of others. We can call one another to account without being insulting. This is important. We can love one another and not tolerate intolerance. This is hard work, but it is the work. It is the work of showing up. It is the opposite of being distracted, it is being alert, aware - both for the ways the world does not reflect the

kin-dom of God and for the dawn from on high that breaks upon us. The disco ball is just beginning the swirl, the DJ is warming up.

And this brings us back to our parable today. The foolish bridesmaids really were fools because they missed the party. They didn't show up. They looked at what they lacked, and ran off to secure it for themselves. They thought they were low on oil, but they were low on light. But there were still five lights! What the fools needed was sitting next to them all along. Five lights might not have been very bright, but the absent bridesmaids still would have been there to greet the bridegroom. When you find your light going dim, don't go off in search of the oil you can secure for yourself. No, when you find your light going out, stay close to the people who still have light. Draw near to those whose hearts are on fire for the kin-dom, who know the dynamic truth of real peace, who proclaim in daylight what was whispered in the dark. Draw near to those who "seek the first kin-dom of God and its righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Five lights might not have been very bright, but ten bridesmaids at the feast would have been a fantastic party.

Beloved of God, the party starts now. Look, the kin-dom of God comes! Ready the world, light your lamps, prepare the feast. Do not let sin distract you. Be present to the pain and plenty, the beauty and brutality of this world. Lean into it. The party is starting. Don't miss it.

Amen.