

WORSHIP OUTLINE - NOVEMBER 8, 2020

COUNTDOWN

OPENING SEQUENCE

OPENING VERSE (Laura)

Psalm 30:11-12 (CEB)

You changed my mourning into dancing. You took off my funeral clothes and dressed me up in joy so that my whole being might sing praises to you and never stop. Lord, my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

PRELUDE

Rise and Rejoice by Franklin Ritter

ONLINE GREETER (Anja B)

HYMN

Great is Thy Faithfulness

READING (Rachael - voice only with images)

The Guest House by Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

OFFERING

SPECIAL MUSIC

Bless This House by Brahe and Martin
Chancel Ensemble

READING

Matthew 25:1-13

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten young bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom. Now five of them were wise, and the other five were foolish. The foolish ones took their lamps but didn’t bring oil for them. But the wise ones took their lamps and also brought containers of oil.

“When the groom was late in coming, they all became drowsy and went to sleep. But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Look, the groom! Come out to meet him.’

“Then all those bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps. But the foolish bridesmaids said to the wise ones, ‘Give us some of your oil, because our lamps have gone out.’

“But the wise bridesmaids replied, ‘No, because if we share with you, there won’t be enough for our lamps and yours. We have a better idea. You go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ But while they were gone to buy oil, the groom came. Those who were ready went with him into the wedding. Then the door was shut.

“Later the other bridesmaids came and said, ‘Lord, lord, open the door for us.’

“But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’

“Therefore, keep alert, because you don’t know the day or the hour.”

SONG: BRIAN

Build My Life

CCLI #7070345 | Brett Younker, Karl Martin, Kirby Kable, Matt Redman, and Pat Barrett

Verse 1

Worthy Of Every Song

We Could Ever Sing

Worthy Of All The Praise

We Could Ever Bring

Worthy Of Every Breath
We Could Ever Breathe
We Live For You

Jesus The Name Above
Every Other Name
Jesus The Only One
Who Could Ever Save

Worthy Of Every Breath
We Could Ever Breathe
We Live For You

Chorus 1
Holy There Is No One Like You
There Is None Beside You
Open Up My Eyes In Wonder

Show Me Who You Are And
Fill Me With Your Heart And
Lead Me In Your Love
To Those Around Me

Verse 2
Jesus The Name Above
Every Other Name
Jesus The Only One
Who Could Ever Save

Worthy Of Every Breath
We Could Ever Breathe
We Live For You

Bridge
I Will Build My Life Upon Your Love
It Is A Firm Foundation
I Will Put My Trust In You Alone
And I Will Not Be Shaken

SERMON

We Give Thanks...for Today
Matthew 25:1-13

Rev. Rachael Warner

This week, I've been up late into the night, many nights in a row. Waiting. I've dozed off into unsettled sleep in the glow of the television screen. I've awakened each day to check back in with the news. In the mornings I've filled my coffee cup and worked, distracted. Waiting.

This week I've been like one of the bridesmaids in Jesus' story. Maybe I'm the only one, but somehow I doubt that. Running my lamp on fumes, falling asleep at the wheel, discovering myself woefully unprepared for my real, significant work and distracted by each sideshow. I wish I could say I am one of the wise bridesmaids in the story, who came prepared to wait and be ready. Unfortunately, not only has my lamp (or in my case, coffee pot) been depleted in the extended waiting, like the lamps of the foolish bridesmaids. It gets worse. The whole time I've been waiting for the name of the earthly, human victor to be announced. I haven't been waiting for Jesus at all. I thought I was waiting for the wedding, and it turns out I've been in the wrong house the whole time.

Meanwhile, the kingdom of this world has successfully distracted me from being prepared for the coming of Jesus. This is my confession. I do not place it on your shoulders, but I do lay it humbly at your feet in case you also find yourself here.

Let me be clear, you will not hear me today or ever saying that whatever happens in our elections or our policies or our public discourse, all that matters is that Jesus is still Lord. True as it is, that statement implies that the consequences of our elections are irrelevant. They are not. The outcomes of our elections are relevant, the tone of our public discourse has consequences, and the choices we make to participate or sit out impact our whole communities.

Today's reading is timely as we come to the end of a very long week and the last few weeks of a very long year. Indeed, Jesus is still the Messiah, and thanks be to God for that! And also, while we've been spending our lamp oil on late night arguments and insults and virtue signaling and exhausting ourselves over counts and percentages, we have been spending down our oil. Will there be any left when Jesus arrives? Will we be prepared to walk with Jesus into a new world? Or will our lamps be spent because Jesus simply took too long and we gave our lamplight to other priorities? What condition will our house be in when he arrives? Will it reflect that we have been about the work of preparing our world to reflect God's kingdom? Will we have plenty of oil, lighting our way night after night and day after day as we do the work of making our world more reflective of God's justice, peace, compassion, and hope? Or are we at risk of needing to run out at the last minute to prepare for Jesus at exactly the moment he arrives to invite us to the feast?

Let me pause for a moment to dig in to the parable Pastor Laura read for us this morning from Matthew 25. First of all, this story does not stand alone. It falls right in the middle of a longer conversation Jesus is having with his followers beginning in chapter 23. This month, as we give thanks, we are going to read Matthew 25 in three segments, but we must note that if you want the fullest possible picture, you could go back and start reading at chapter 23. This is a

conversation about what we call eschatology in our expensive theological language, or the end times or the second coming. Jesus is trying to help his disciples understand what the coming of God's kingdom, when Jesus returns and all is put right, will look like. He decides to do this using parables, metaphors, images. Some of us might wish he had instead drawn a simple diagram or emailed a spreadsheet.

Over several chapters, with one story after another, Jesus uses familiar scenarios from the time and culture to describe what it will be like when the kingdom of heaven is fully realized. Today, we've read one of those stories where Jesus describes his return through the metaphor of an ancient Palestinian tradition of a groom coming to retrieve his bride. We, and by we I mean I, do not have a clear and thorough understanding of first century Palestinian wedding customs. Because of this, we could spend a lot of time rustling around in the details of this story - and miss the point entirely. Indeed, we could burn our lamps down to the fumes asking about the symbolism and imagery in the story. Why did the bridesmaids wait this way for the groom? Couldn't they have shared lamps? What's the point of this tradition? Did they really lock the doors to the wedding once the bride and groom arrived? What if the wedding were held outdoors? Why was the groom late? Is this wedding really starting at midnight? Was there a 24-hour Walmart in ancient Palestine where the five foolish bridesmaids planned to go buy more oil at midnight when they realized they had run low?

We could run our own lamps down to fumes caught up in all of these questions, couldn't we? All for a story meant to mean something in a cultural context about which we know very little and from which we are drastically removed. I'm not sure that's the best use of this time, so instead I suggest we try instead to consider the larger point. Can we grasp the point of the story without understanding the metaphor? Or, at the very least, can Jesus' words here point us to the kinds of questions that will help us examine our own lives in our time and context as we try to be followers of Jesus who are prepared for his arrival?

Underneath the story is the question, will we be prepared when Jesus comes? Will we have enough oil to keep our lamps burning? Or will we have been distracted by other priorities, or naive in thinking it would have happened by now, and find ourselves unprepared and scrambling to get our act together when Jesus arrives?

This is not only a story that tells us to be prepared for the coming of God's kingdom, but also a story that suggests we must be prepared for the long arc of waiting. So what does it look like to be prepared? How do we want Jesus to find us? Will we still be burning our lamps, or will we be burned out?

If I'm being honest, I'm thankful Jesus didn't come this week. He would have caught me burned out, worn out, and unprepared. He would have caught me spending my oil on my exhaustion, anger, fear, and anxiety instead of on compassion, hope, justice, and peacemaking. And really, it's hard to imagine a day when it would be the right moment for Jesus to come, isn't it? At least it is hard if we think everything has to be perfect - that we have to be perfect. Does

being prepared mean that every day we wake up and get it all right? That we've been perfectly faithful, perfectly loyal, perfectly good?

What is the oil that will keep our lamps burning? Is it perfection oil? Where can a person even buy that?

Or, perhaps, is the oil we need about repentance, willingness, ongoing commitment to God's kingdom, day after day keeping after the values Jesus has named as his mission on earth: removing injustice, liberating the oppressed, freeing the captives, bringing good news to the poor, healing the sick? Is the oil we need, in order to keep our lamps burning, a relentless commitment to the greatest commandment - to loving God and loving our neighbors?

I asked this question to our Thursday Bible study group this week, and we thought of many examples where Jesus answers this question: when he heals a beggar, when he meets a tax collector for lunch, when he draws a line in the sand to protect an accused woman, when he says to a criminal hanging next to him, "Today you will be with me in paradise." It does not appear that preparedness equals some kind of moral perfectionism. Instead, preparedness for Jesus suggests a daily willingness to be about God's work in our world.

The events of this week have reminded me of a difficult truth. I will burn out again and again and again if I put my hope in an earthly hero. I will burn out again and again and again if I make an idol out of my own self-interest. I will burn out again and again and again if I believe that the work of God's kingdom is contained in one leader, one party, one ballot, one pulpit.

The only source of oil that I can count on, that will come through for me at midnight, is God's faithfulness. When I remain committed, day after day, to loving God and loving others - and all that entails:

- offering my ear and my compassion to the grieving
- forgiving and restoring broken relationships
- relentlessly naming injustice and working for equity and the dignity of all people
- willingness to give up a measure of my own comfort for the humanity of my neighbor
- working for liberation, listening to the voices of the marginalized, seeking justice

What does the Lord require of us, but to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly? That's the spreadsheet on how to be prepared for the day Jesus comes.

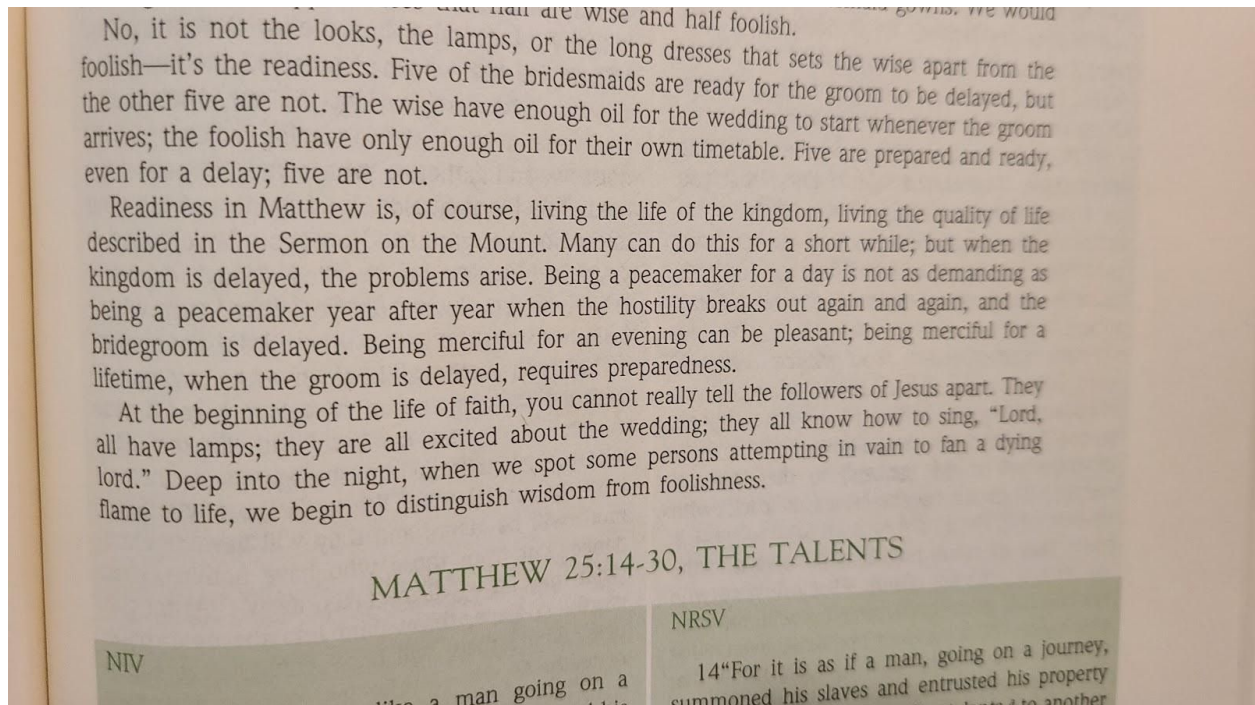
This is not a sprint - Jesus tells us we will be waiting longer than we want to wait, longer than we thought we'd have to. And it can be exhausting to constantly wonder how long it will take.

But Jesus also tells us God's kingdom is here and God's kingdom is coming.

And so, for today, we wait. We keep our lamps burning. We share our oil with one another so that no one has to leave when they feel depleted. We pay attention to significant moments where our voices, our votes, our advocacy, our prayer, our faith, our hope, our love can make a

difference. We feed people, we share clothing, we give Christmas gifts, we buy chickens for a far away farm, we deliver meals, we offer hospitality to those in transitional housing situations, we call and check in with those experiencing grief, loneliness, or sickness. We prepare, and we wait, and we prepare. We give thanks for today and do our very best today to make this world a little bit more ready for Jesus.

In his commentary on Matthew 25, M. Eugene Borling writes,



May we be wise, and may we hold one another well, and may our flame be stronger today than ever as we follow Jesus, provide hope, and make new disciples. Thank you, God, for today.

Amen.

HYMN

What Does the Lord Require of You

PASTORAL PRAYER

THE LORD'S PRAYER

HYMN

Seek Ye First

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE