

November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Amos 5: 18-24; Psalm 70; 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18; Matthew 25: 1-13

After Pentecost 23

“Keep awake”. “Stay ready”. Last weekend I participated in a Prayer Vigil held at Lake Station Town Hall. Pastors and lay ministers from surrounding churches prayed for guidance during our election and also during our being in the middle of a pandemic. On occasion, I heard in the prayers for God to enable us to be prepared for the rapture, the coming again of Christ, whenever it might be. The rapture, you may recall became quite popularized in the Left Behind series both books and movie.

Again, I ask, to be prepared for what? Get ready for what? Christ is coming again, we are told. Ok. So, we are saved by grace not of works, so why are we being told to keep ready and stay alert for Christ’s coming again, for the rapture? Should I be feeding the hungry, carrying for the poor the minute Christ’s arrives? Will that save me from his judgment?

It is believed by many that believing in Christ is what is meant to be ready, to be alert. However, when you think of the story of the bridesmaids, all ten *believed* in the bridegroom, who is supposed to be

Jesus, and all ten *believed* that there was a wedding. Five were prepared for a long wait and five were not.

So, what is Jesus telling us in this parable? What does to be ready for the coming again of Christ, mean? I can't take anything with me. I don't have an overnight bag at the ready or money in my pocket for when the rapture happens. If I am swopped up into heaven, I don't think I need anything I have here. Nor do I need a check list of all the things I have done that assures me into heaven. Why did Jesus die on the cross for me, if I need to keep record of my actions to get me into heaven?

When you think about it, --Christ is already here. His Spirit lives in and among us. Cannot we view this "be awake, be ready" call to heed the call of Christ here and now in our midst? Be awake to Christ's presence, now. Be alert and ready for his using us now to spread his gospel.

In other words, some believe that Christ has already "come again" and that is, in his resurrection. Be ready, be alert, --for the *living* Christ, for the Christ that is with us, day in and day out, 24/7. Yes, be alert, be ready for Christ moving us in one direction or another, moving us to bring his love and mercy within our midst.

Be alert, be ready to reach out --when we are not expecting to do so; be alert, be ready to reach out --in order to hold someone up; be ready, be alert, to reach out --by simply saying a kind word to someone; be ready, be alert, to reach out --to speak to someone, saying anything, something mundane, even, so that in speaking to someone, we are letting them know we see them, we notice them.

Be ready to be alert and be alert to be ready, for sharing the love and mercy of Jesus Christ through word and deed.

There is one thing I haven't mentioned that is in our gospel lesson today and that is what Jesus tells us *not* to do. Be ready and be alert *not* to judge others. You notice in the story of the bridesmaids, the one who judges the ones who did not bring enough oil was the bridegroom. This is telling. How easily it would have been for the bridesmaids with enough oil to make a judgement about those who did not bring enough. But the bridesmaids who brought enough oil kept silent and did not judge the bridesmaids who did not bring enough oil.

Judging others is so easy, as we all know. I heard someone who called in on a radio show the other day make a statement and by the time the commentator was finished responding to her statement, he had painted her as something he absolutely did not know whether it was true or not. He took her one statement and characterized her from

that one statement to be someone who was outlandishly bigoted and biased. And being that it was a radio program taking questions, she had no way of defending herself.

Have we not done this as well? We hear something, we see something and make a judgement, not just about that one thing, but about something way beyond what little we had seen or heard.

This is an underlying theme of the lesson of Jesus in our gospel today. Jesus tells us to live, with him in our heart and soul, but leave the judgement of human character up to him. We have not a clue about people's lives, other than what we see and what we hear. We have no access to other people's thinking, to their past, to their reactions of what has happened to them in the past that perhaps makes them the way they are now. We see what we see; we hear what we hear. Judge not.

So, be alert and be ready --to leave the act of judging others to Christ. Instead --be alert and be ready for Christ to lead us to others to share --not our judgement, but to share the love and mercy and forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

Amen,

Pastor Scales