

SERMON FOR NOVEMBER 9, 2014

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i

United Church of Christ – 22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture: Matthew 25:1-13

Message: *"Living Into the Kingdom @ Every Moment—Doing the Work That Each Day Presents!"*

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GATHERING IN THE WORD OF GOD

November is a hard month to preach—part of that is that we are in the *cycle of the church calendar*, as November draws us closer toward Christ the King Sunday (November 23rd & Thanksgiving Sunday). Also in our lectionary readings (*Scripture readings for each Sunday in the year*) we are anticipating Christ's Second Advent & coming as we prepare for the 1st Sunday of Advent which is November 30, 2014!

Matthew offers more warnings about *hellfire* and *gnashing teeth* than the rest of the evangelists (Mark, Luke, John) combined! And so this Sunday and those that will follow will treat us to exhortations and encouragements to wait, to make the most of our gifts, and to do good . . . or else!

HEARING THE WORD OF GOD

Scripture Reading: *Matthew 25:1-13 (VOICE Bible)*

25 ¹**Jesus:** *Or picture* the kingdom of heaven *this way*. *It will be like ten bridesmaids who each picked up a lantern and went out to meet a certain bridegroom.* ²⁻⁴ *Five of these women were sensible, good with details, and remembered to bring small flasks of oil for their lanterns. But five of them were flighty, too caught up in the excitement of their jaunt, and forgot to bring oil with them.* ⁵ *The bridegroom did not turn up right away. Indeed, all the women, while waiting, found themselves falling asleep.* ⁶ *And then in the middle of the night, they heard someone call, "The bridegroom is here, finally! Wake up and greet him!"* ⁷ *The women got up and trimmed the wicks of their lanterns and prepared to go*

greet the groom. ⁸ The five women who had no oil turned to their friends for help.

Ill-prepared Bridesmaids: Please give us some of your oil! Our lanterns are flickering and will go out soon.

⁹ But the five women who'd come prepared with oil said they didn't have enough.

Prepared Bridesmaids: If we give you some of our oil, we'll all run out too soon! You'd better go wake up a dealer and buy your own supply.

¹⁰ So the five *ill-prepared* women went in search of oil to buy, and while they were gone, the groom arrived. The five who stood ready *with their lanterns* accompanied him to the wedding party, and *after they arrived*, the door was shut.

¹¹ Finally the rest of the women turned up *at the party*. They knocked on the door.

Ill-prepared Bridesmaids: Master, open up and let us in!

Bridegroom (*refusing*): ¹² I certainly don't know you.

¹³ So stay awake; you neither know the day nor hour [when the Son of Man will come].

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Here are some interesting things about our Parable of the wedding story in Matthew 25:

1. Where's the bride? We have the bridegroom and the bridesmaids but no bride.
2. Why did the five so-called *wise* virgins bring an extra can of oil along? What made them think to do that?
3. What's the deal with the 5 bridesmaids refusing to share their oil with the other 5 who were running out? This is so 'unchristian'. Wouldn't a generous person share their oil? Half of the 5 girls hoard their extra supply, sending the other 5 on the unlikely errand of finding an oil shop still open at midnight.

What's **core issue** of this Parable?

Jesus is on the Mount of Olives talking about the end of the world. All of Matthew 24 was about the *apocalyptic rhetoric* about the signs of the end of the age.

Throughout Matthew 24 Jesus makes it clear that there will be, one day, an end to things as we now know them. But Jesus is equally clear that no one, including apparently himself (for the time being anyway)—knows when that time will be precisely. There will be no missing it *when* it happens. Until then—however—Jesus warns the disciples to steer clear of anyone who claims to have it all figured out.

Despite what folks predict even today, Jesus says that all such speculation and calculation is wrong. And since Jesus himself indicates that even he doesn't know the date or time—it's a certainty that no will calculate that date based on Jesus' words!

In Matthew 24 Jesus is not trying to create *starry-eyed disciples* who do nothing than scan the horizon for clues as to history's end. **Jesus is trying to create focused disciples who keep their eyes on chief things of the gospel.** Jesus is not training short-distance sprinters and runners who will perpetually dash for history's finish line but long distance marathon runners who are poised to stay faithful over the long haul!

In this understanding then—the reason to plan ahead on the likely need for extra oil becomes clear. Wise believers will not necessarily think that the end is near. The wise won't bother with predictions that might prod and push us into thinking that the end of everything is so just around the corner—that we don't need to bother with things like taking care of our environment and our Earth; or developing long-term strategies for peace among nations, or nurturing a faith strong enough to deal with issues that may come up many years from now.

The wise—in other words—take the long look!

But in so doing, such wise believers don't display an uncaring attitude as to when the end may come but a *very caring one*. Living with the end in sight leads to meaning being some starry-eyed person who does nothing but scan the horizon. In fact—what it should mean is living into the Kingdom at every, every moment, doing the work that each day presents to us and doing it precisely because we know the Bridegroom is **always** close at hand—where then end happens anytime soon or not!

The foolish are those who are not able to stick with Jesus' program over the long haul. Maybe what makes the foolish virgins so foolish (so "*useless*" for the Kingdom) is that they adopted the prudent and shrewd ways of this world—living for the moment, going for the gusto, and allowing this world's standards to define "*the good life.*" But what is prudent and sensible to this world is foolish in the world of Jesus' Kingdom where the meek, the lowly, and the merciful come out on top!

DOING THE WORD OF GOD

What is the Word of God for us this morning?

1. ONE: OUR CHURCH IS A PLACE WHERE WE CAN FIND HELP AND SUPPORT IN OUR WAITING—ALL KINDS OF WAITING!

- There are things to do: caring for families and individuals; Bible studies, visiting and praying for each other.
- Our Visitation Teams visit our seniors regularly who are at home, in care homes, in hospices and other places! Our Team is organized by our Fellowship Committee co-chaired by Sally Wong. Pray for Sally, her 96 year-old Mother Fanny died this week!
- We are always looking for volunteers on our ministry teams, helping on our building and grounds, folks who can help us with our historical records—organizing and making sure they are safe and good for the years ahead!

- If you want to help and got some time—talk to members of our Board!

2.TWO: WE THE CHURCH IS THOSE WHO WAIT FOR AND WITH EACH OTHER!

We wait and sit vigil for each other in times of pain, loss or bereavement.

We are those who celebrate achievements and console one another after disappointments.

We are those who give hope when hope is scarce, comfort when it is needed and courage when we are afraid!

We are the ones who help each other to wait, prepare, and keep the faith!

3.THREE: WE ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER TO WAIT, TO PREPARE, AND KEEP THE FAITH!

We encourage each other with the promises of Christ! That's why we come together each Sunday—to hear and share the hope-creating promises of our Lord.

Our Church gathers regularly in worship and in ministry teams. We need to gather with those in our Church who are unable to come to church—we need to gather, pray and fellowship with them where they are!

SENDING IN THE WORD OF GOD

Now, there's no question that Jesus pointed to a future fulfillment of the strange kingdom that we can only glimpse here and now. And it's also clear that Jesus warned that we would all be accountable for our actions in this life. **But the biblical view of judgment is very different from what you find in apocalyptic genre and writings:**

- **Biblical judgment always leads to restoration.**
- **Biblical judgment is about redeeming those who have gone astray, not punishing them.**
- **Biblical judgment is about God's justice of mercy that forgives all sin and creates the possibility of new life for us all.**

In God's judgment, the only things that are destroyed are sin and death (1 Cor. 15:58). In God's judgment, what is final is that God's steadfast love endures forever (Ps. 106:1). In God's judgment, what is final is that all things are restored by Jesus our Savior (Eph. 1:10). In God's judgment, what is final is that every knee shall bow and every person who ever lived or ever will live will one day acknowledge God as their Savior (Isa. 45:22-23; Phil. 2:10-11).

It seems to me that the only thing final about God's judgment is that God has determined to "make everything new" (Rev. 21:5). It is the promise of the fulfillment of God's strange kingdom of justice and peace and mercy and joy and love and life.

In the end, Jesus says, those on their way to Heaven will be decided by what they gave away, whether they fed the poor, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, visited the sick and imprisoned! Whether they shared what they had. Whether they shared their oil!

THANKS ARE TO GOD!