

Proper 27 A 2020

Wisdom 6:12-16

Psalm 70

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13

Human beings are not very good at waiting –
And what a wait we have had.

We are not very good at waiting,
And one of the many pains of human life
Is that we have to spend so much time
Doing something we are so bad at.

In the days of this past week,
Days that seemed like months,
We waited together in our separate places.

How did we wait?
We are a people of hope.
We are a people who every year
celebrate a whole season of waiting
Before we proclaim the promise of God.
But this was hard.

In the months and years ahead,
We will look at how we waited through this time,
We will wonder what we have learned,
We will do the work we have been given to do,
And we will tend the vision of a future with hope for all.

Today, one phase of the waiting is over.
In this moment we breathe out,
And take a fresh breath in.
And because we are a people formed by scripture,
By the great story of the holy one
Who enters the world in love,
Because we are a people who find meaning
In the experience and witness
Of those who have gone before,
Let's pause and look at the story
We were given for today.

At first glance,
What could be weirder?

A month or so ago,
When the St. Andrew's staff looked ahead
To see what our parish family would be reading
the Sunday after the election,
We laughed.

The wise and foolish bridesmaids?
Where do we go with that?

This parable has to carry a lot of baggage.
Some other time,
Perhaps we can look at it together
And let go some of the burdens
It seems to foist upon us.
The parable is clouded by the anxious voice of a community
That – like the rest of us –
Couldn't fully comprehend
Or live into the all-embracing promise of Jesus.
Where Jesus flung wide the doors
And invited everyone to the feast,
His followers left us with a false story
Of a closed door and a table
Where only some are welcome.

If you want to hear and see
A wider, wilder,
Messier and more gracious ending to the story,
One that seems more like the wild and gracious Jesus
Who welcomed sinners and ate with them,
Then you can't do better than this brief poem,
From Thomas Merton:

*There were five howling (or scatter-brained) virgins
Who came
To the Wedding of the Lamb
With their disabled motorcycles
And their oil tanks
Empty.
But since they knew how
To dance
A person says to them
To stay anyhow.
And there you have it,
There were five noisy virgins
Without gas
But looking good*

In the traffic of the dance. (but well-involved in the action of the dance)
Consequently
There were ten virgins
*At the Wedding of the Lamb.**

Don't be trapped in a narrow reading of the parable;
See the door open and join the dancing in the streets.
Let your mind leap,
As Merton's did,
To what you know of Jesus,
Jesus who is the wisdom of God.

The wisdom of God.
This past week,
As we waited for the days to crawl by like months,
That's what I heard in this parable.

Waiting, and wisdom.

The waiting is inevitable,
And beyond our control.
We learned that again,
This past week.

The waiting was beyond our control,
But the manner in which we wait
Is a chance to show our stuff.

How did we wait?
How would we want to wait,
Another time?

Were we wise, or foolish?

This is not a question for worry,
But for wonder.
Because the mystery is this:
Wisdom was with us,
Whether we were wise or not.

Holy Wisdom is a person and a power,
Not an idea to hold or an item to possess.
Holy Wisdom is the actor of God in the world,
Creating, maintaining,
Healing and mending.
Keeping lamps lit

And ready to light the way.

Wisdom is a companion and comforter.
And at the same time,
Wisdom troubles the water
If things look too calm.

Holy Wisdom is the brooding of God
over the world,
the seeking, the finding,
the welcoming of all who are ready
to come to the table,
the faithfulness in watching over those
who are not ready yet.
No one is left out;
It's just that some haven't yet arrived.
There is dancing in the streets,
And someday the whole world will dance.

Scripture tells us,
And I believe this truth resonates in our hearts,
Scripture tells us that Holy Wisdom is powerful,
Beautiful as the sun,
Free from anxiety,
More mobile than any motion. **
And scripture tells us
That Holy Wisdom,
Who can go anywhere,
Into any closed space,
Any dark room,
Holy Wisdom enters our souls
And makes us friends of God,
And prophets,
Speakers of the truth of God.

That's what this parable can tell us today,
As we round the corner of our waiting
And look to the days ahead.

What Holy Wisdom is,
She invites us to become:
Healers and reconcilers,
Menders and makers.

So what does that wisdom look like,
On the ground, in the streets,

Across a nation
And on our planet?

Remember Wisdom can do all things,
Enter any closed space,
Reach from one end of the earth to the other,
And order all things well.

When Wisdom comes to live with us,
In us,
Wisdom looks like deep listening,
Wisdom looks like compassion.
Wisdom is curious about the other,
And open to change.

Wisdom is ready, when the moment comes,
To get up, trim the lamp,
And set out to greet the future with hope,
All over again.

The way to the promised feast is long.
But along the way,
There is dancing in the streets,
And some lamps are brightly burning –
Enough lamps to light the way
To the open door,
And the welcome table.

*Thomas Merton, “The Five Virgins.” Thanks to Matt Bentley for offering this poem as part of this week’s Still Point meditation: <http://www.standrewdenver.org/proper-twentyseven-11-8-20>

**Wisdom of Solomon 7