

## **24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost November 12, 2023**

### **Amos 5:18-24- Matthew 25:1-13**

The texts for November are interesting. You can see in them what once was an extension of the season of Advent. A focus, like the parable of the ten bridesmaids, on the (delayed) promise of Jesus' coming again.

And Jesus will come again. This expectation is clear in the earliest writings of the church and we proclaim that faith in the Creeds of the church, our basic statements of faith. But Jesus has not come back yet. So, we live in the meantime. In a reality with two outcomes; that Jesus comes tomorrow and that Jesus doesn't. The question troubling the church of Matthew and still haunts us now is... How, then, do we live in the meantime? Do we live as if Jesus isn't coming tomorrow (or perhaps ever?) or do we live as if Jesus is coming tomorrow? or the next hour? or the next minute?

I wonder, along with other commentators, if the last words of Matthew's Gospel give us the lens in which we see this text. It is the Great Commission, where the Risen Jesus tells his followers to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."

I wonder if the first sermon of Jesus- the Sermon on the Mount gives us a lens in which we see this text. A painting of a vision of the reign of God already here on earth. Come near in Jesus.

I wonder, if what Matthew is saying is that in the meantime, we prepare for the day Jesus comes by living out who he has called us to be. We

proclaim the gospel to all nations, we baptize in the name of the triune God. We teach the things we know about who Jesus is and what we are called to be. We live as if those who mourn are comforted, loving our enemies as well as neighbors, turning the other cheek, not clenching the first.

I wonder if this waiting is an active thing, you can hear it in the Great Commission: “go”, “make”, “baptize”, “teach”. “love”, “comfort”, “make peace”. It is done with an expectation of the coming again but not the necessity of it happening tomorrow. In many ways, no matter how we live in the meantime, we are to do just that...live... to move and breathe, and interact, and love, and laugh, all while keeping an eye out for Jesus to come again. To imagine that we live this life within sight of his coming again. Like trying to get that last forbidden record put away before mom pulls into the garage!

The other question that might affect how we wait is to think about what we are waiting for. When Jesus comes again, where does your imagination go? Is it a separation of the sheep and the goats, a time of judgment and weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth? Or do we envision a party. This is what the text we have today reminds us is coming. We are waiting for something joyful! A party! A wedding party at that! Where there is music, dancing, plenty of food and drink and where we get to do the Chicken Dance! What could be better than that!?

Robert Capon wrote about it this way, “When all is said and done—when we have scared ourselves silly with the now-or-never urgency of faith and the once-and-always finality of judgment—we need to take a deep breath and let it out with a laugh. Because what we are watching for is a party.

And that party is not just down the street making up its mind when to come to us. It is already hiding in our basement, banging on our steam pipes, and laughing its way up our cellar stairs. The unknown day and hour of its finally bursting into the kitchen and roistering its way through the whole house is not dreadful; it is all part of the divine lark of grace. God is not our mother-in-law, coming to see whether her wedding-present china has been chipped. He is a funny Old Uncle with a salami under one arm and a bottle of wine under the other. We do indeed need to watch for him; but only because it would be such a pity to miss all the fun.”

And there is more than that, listen to the promise of Jesus, the last words of the Gospel of Matthew, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Even as we are here in the meantime, we also know that Jesus is with us now. How? In the meal we share each week, bread and wine that Jesus says, “This is my body, this is my blood”, in the Word of God proclaimed, which the author of the gospel of John reminds us is Jesus. In the person we clothe and the prisoner we visit, as Matthew himself says later in chapter 25. Jesus is here. Even as we wait, we do not wait alone.

Waiting is hard, especially if the outcome is not particularly good for us. A diagnosis, a verdict. What we wait for is the best news.

It will be as the prophet Amos said. When Christ comes again justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. War will be no more, death will be no more, people won’t kill our brothers and sisters while they sit at their breakfast tables, or huddle in their apartment buildings.

Those waters of justice and righteousness- right relationship with God and one another- are the same waters in Revelation. The river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. And on its banks, the tree of life, with twelve kinds of fruit, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

Grief will be no more. Disease will be no more. There will be peace between peoples, not because one dominates the other, but because we love one another.

This is the divine imagination that Jonah and Lena get baptized into this day. Where the waters of baptism will clean their vision so that they can see overlaid on this world, the reality of God's reign.

And it looks an awful lot like a wild thumping party filled with friends and those who will be friends. It looks like a feast fit for a wandering son come home again. With food enough for all. A Thanksgiving feast beyond compare. Can you imagine it?

A feast we get a foretaste of at this meal, in this place. Surrounded by the great cloud of witnesses- can you see them? Joined by these two new saints- Jonah and Lena. A feast of fine wine and bread beyond compare. A feast hosted by the only one who can free us from our own delusions. Jesus.

Let us keep this imagination alive as we envision Christ's return, and all it stands for. And in so doing, proclaim that God's promises are true. That when we are baptized into Christ's death, we are also baptized into his resurrection. That what we eat today is but a foretaste of the feast to come. Just the appetizers for that great thumping wedding party to come.