

Preparing for the Future

November 12, 2024

Introduction

We're almost one quarter of the way into this century. And I find myself waxing more nostalgic about the last century as each day passes. One thing I think about a lot is neckties. I can't remember how young I was when I first learned to tie a necktie. Actually, when I was a kid, they were usually clip-ons. But wearing a tie was part of dressing up. That's something people used to do before going out. When Carol and I went to Gino's for her birthday dinner, I was the only guy in the place in a suit and tie. But it's not just me. Carol's dad, who drove a truck for US Steel, wouldn't leave the house without a tie. If he was working on the farm and needed a part, he would clean up and put on a shirt and tie before going to the hardware store. Dressing up showed respect. Now, it's more important to be casual, comfortable, and relaxed. Neckties are as popular as working with pen and paper.

Time

Of course, dressing up takes time. And that's one thing that seems to be in short supply now. We're always trying to stay on schedule, trying to "save time." How many times have you said, "I'd really like to do that, but I just don't have the time?" It's interesting how we have so many time-saving gadgets and technology is making things so much easier and faster for us, yet it seems like we have less time than we ever had. So, if we don't dress up, that's one way we can save time.

Getting Ready

But it takes time to get ready for anything worthwhile. That's what Jesus is talking about here in our Gospel lesson this morning, taking the time to get ready. He uses the parable of the ten virgins to show us how we are to be ready for Him when He returns.

The Ten Virgins

I remember a Sunday school teacher telling this story one time, and she said that the ten foolish virgins were too concerned with their make-up and hair to think about the possibility they might need extra oil for their lamps. Maybe she didn't like to get dressed up herself. For Jesus doesn't say that. He only says, "*Five of them were foolish and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps*" (**Matthew 25:2–4**). They fell asleep while waiting for the groom because he was late in coming.

"Be Ready"

When the bridegroom finally came at midnight, their lamps were going out. But the five wise virgins had spare oil. The five foolish ones had no oil. They were not ready. Since the wise virgins didn't have enough oil to share, the foolish had to go buy more. But when they got back, the door was closed and locked. They could not get into the wedding banquet. The moral of the story then is to be ready whenever Jesus returns, for we do not know when that will be.

How Can We Be Ready?

But what does this mean? How can we be ready? Some attempt to answer this question by trying to figure out what the oil represents. Some of the suggestions over the years are faith, compassion, or good works. But good works don't save, and you can't have "extra" faith or compassion. Reformed theologian Martin Bucer says that we should forget the allegorizing and focus on what Jesus says the point of the parable is: *"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour"* (**Matthew 25:13**).

Interpreting Scripture with Scripture

In our Lectionary readings, the Old Testament reading is known as "complimentary." This means that, in some way, it goes along with the Gospel lesson. In **Amos 5**, we read that if we desire the day of the Lord, we should *let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream* (**Amos 5:24**).

Justice

Simply put, justice is treating other people rightly, or right living toward other people. This is not just making sure people "get what they deserve." True justice is living by the Golden Rule, doing unto others as we would have others do unto us. "How would I want to be treated if I were in their shoes?" At first glance, it might seem like no one would ever be held accountable for any misdeeds. But justice must also be accompanied by righteousness.

Righteousness

If justice is right living toward other people, righteousness is right living toward God. The catch is that none of us can live rightly toward God. We are all sinners and have fallen short of His glory (**Romans 3:23**). If God gave us our just desserts, we would be dead. For that's what we deserve: *The wages of sin is death* (**Romans 6:23**). But when God deals with us, He does it with love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness. God doesn't excuse wrongdoings. He deals with sin head-on. He exposes it with the Light of His Word. But because Jesus paid the price and died on the cross, for His sake, God forgives us in His mercy. Nobody is let off the hook. Jesus died in our place and our sin is taken away from us. Thanks to God's grace, we are no longer under sin's penalty or power.

Letting Justice Roll

We let justice roll when we pass that love and forgiveness on to others. When we share Jesus and His Gospel with others, we are letting justice roll down like waters. We are letting righteousness flow like an ever-flowing stream. We are watching and waiting. We are being ready for His coming. **WE ARE PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE.**

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
