

# Prepared to be Known

a sermon on Matthew 25:1-13  
November 12, 2017

*Now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer.*



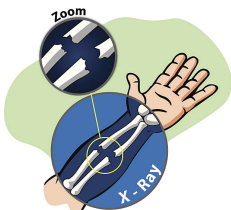
Today's gospel reading is a parable, one sometimes that to be about Christ's Second Coming. I don't find that to be a necessary interpretation, and one that is not all that helpful. I'm reminded of another parable-like story about a four-car pile-up out in the boondocks, miles from the nearest town, if the place is large enough to be called that. Anyway, in this story, one of the drivers was able to call for an ambulance, and was told that one was on its way, but that they were about 31 miles away so it would take a while. He was also given the instruction to **stay off the road and keep alert, not to let anyone doze off**. He relays this message to the others involved in the accident with some interesting results:



- (1) One ornery man decides to leave on foot, thinking **he can take care of himself** better than waiting around for an ambulance that he's not even sure is coming.
- (2) Then there's an old couple who keep bickering over how to **determine the precise moment** when the ambulance will arrive. **Calculating** the number of miles, road conditions and the probable speed, factoring in the amount of time elapsed during the phone conversation, etc. etc. Finally they decide after such careful study of the **exact words** that there is a "**hidden meaning**" and "stay off the road" means that the ambulance driver isn't using the road, and that they should get as far away from it as possible.

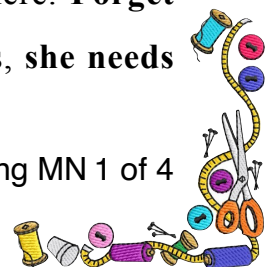
**SECRET MEANING**

- (3) Oh, and then there is a woman who is just **mortified** that her dress got ripped and is determined to mend it before the ambulance gets there. **Forget the fact** that she just broke her arm and possibly a few ribs, **she needs**



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to fix her dress, and ends up hiding when the ambulance does arrive because she didn't manage to do so on time and didn't think she looked presentable.



Yeah. Talk about **missing the point**. That story actually gets even funnier when you know all the crazy things that people say regarding the Second Coming, that tend to make me downplay the whole thing. Still, keep the story in mind, it is not entirely unrelated.

Anyhow, Jesus tells us what his parable is about in the very first line: **The Kingdom of heaven** will be like this...

...right. The kingdom of heaven. If you want to think about this as a story about preparing for death, or rather, for the next life in the kingdom, I think that a probable interpretation.



At any rate, there are these women who are waiting. The word in Greek for them does say **virgins**, and I know there's an interpretation that these were virgins in the sense that they had **dedicated their lives to the service of God in the Temple**. Within the story, in the context of a wedding, bridesmaids makes sense, nevertheless, it may be worthwhile to consider that these women, all ten, were waiting, allegorically looking forward to the day when they would see their Lord face to face. Five thought to **build up their store of oil ahead of time**. Five did not. This oil is often thought of as a metaphor for the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, that is, being filled with the love of God, and growing in the likeness of Christ.

When the bridegroom, allegorically Christ, arrives, he parties with the five who were prepared to do so. The other five didn't increase their "oil." God gives the grace of his presence to all, planted as a seed within us. Some nurture this grace and grow spiritually. But like the foolish five,



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some **don't even realize that they were supposed to until it is too late and no one can help them.**

Quite often, at least historically, this parable is **told back to back with** the gospel reading slated for next week, the **parable of the talents**, in which three servants are given “talents” and one invests it and doubles what was given to him, and the second does the same, but the third buried his talent instead of using it and growing it. This third servant was rebuked when his master came to collect whereas

the other two were praised with a “**well-done good and faithful servant.**” The two stories have much the same message, and in fact if you read through some of the sermons from the third and fourth centuries, you'll see these stories treated together. The moral is to **use what God gives you and so grow.**



To return to today's story, what these foolish five are told when they return from finally buying some extra oil: Truly I say to you **I do not know you.** That has got to hurt. Imagine being that person going before the Lord, and being told that you are not recognized by him. You might be thinking that is crazy talk, you can point to a dozen other places in scripture that assure us that God “has searched you and known you” that he “knows our hearts.” And he does. The word used in those instances means a knowing related to knowledge of the truth of things, as opposed to the word used in this parable which has to do with knowing based on sight. The word could be literally translated as “have seen” - **Truly I tell you I have not seen you.** He's saying that there was no relationship, because a relationship involves two parties. God reaches out to everyone, but not everyone responds. Not responding to God is just not something that you want to make a habit. These virgins had neglected their relationship with God. Perhaps they thought they didn't have to and could go it on their own. Perhaps they were



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distracted by academic arguments. Perhaps they were busy mending their dresses. Whatever it was, they tragically **forgot what was needful** in their lives.

The Westminster Catechism in our *Book of Confessions* tells us that the **chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever**. That is what is needful. To



glorify God and enjoy him. To have a relationship with him. To grow more like him, as happens in any relationship. You tend to start acting and thinking like those people you spend the most time with. What if that person you spent the most time with was Christ?

We don't just find God and that's it. We seek God, we find God, we want more of God. We want more time with him, we **want a deeper relationship** that keeps us seeking our Lord - not just until we don't feel like it anymore, or we burn out, run out of oil. Instead we are **in this for the long-run** and prepare to **keep ourselves going in the faith**.

I think that is what today's Gospel challenges us to do.

While we have the time and opportunity, we should be **seeking God and developing that relationship with Him**, becoming filled with his love and filling all we do with it. **Filling the lamps of our souls with this oil of love**, we become more and more ready to meet our bridegroom, Christ, and have him **recognize something of Himself in us**. And hear:

Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your master.