



The Cry At Midnight

(The Meaning Behind The Parable of The 10 Bridesmaids)

Matthew 25:1-25:13

For those not familiar with an Anglican Service; there are four Scripture Readings before the Sermon. The Scripture Readings for this day were: Joshua:24:1-3a,14-25; Psalm 78:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and Mathew 25:1-13.

A film crew was on location deep in the desert. One day an old Indian went up to the director and said, "Tomorrow rain." (P) The next day it rained.

A week later, the Indian went up to the director and said, "Tomorrow storm." The next day there was a hailstorm.

"This Indian is incredible," said the director. He told his secretary to hire the Indian to predict the weather for the remainder of the shoot.

However, after several successful predictions, the old Indian did not show up for two weeks.

Finally the director sent for him. "I have to shoot a big scene tomorrow," said the director, "and I am depending on you. What will the weather be like?"

The Indian shrugged his shoulders. "Don't know," he said. "My radio is broken."

Appearances are deceiving the foolish virgins in the Gospel reading (looked, dressed and marched like bridesmaids.)

They were pretty, radiant and even charming on the outside, but dreary, dim and dull on the inside.

The word "foolish" is none other than the Greek word "moros," which is the root word for the politically incorrect English word "moron".

Now the scene of this parable of the 10 Bridesmaids focuses on preparations for a wedding banquet that is to take place in the home of the groom.

A great crowd of family and friends fills the grooms home and they pour out into the street in front of the dwelling.

As the crowd is gathering, the groom and several close friends are making their way to the home of the bride, which is assumed to be across town or in a nearby village.

From there the groom collects his bride and escorts her back to his family home, where the crowd awaits and the marriage feast will be held.

When bride was ready, she would be placed on the back of a riding animal and the groom, with his friends, would form a disorganized, exuberant parade.

This happy group would take the longest possible route back to the groom's home.

Deliberately wandering through as many streets of the village as possible so that most of the people could see and cheer them as they pass.

At the groom's home some of the crowd would wait in the street as they anticipate the arrival of the meandering wedding party. (Pause)

The parable takes place at night, and among the guests are 10 young women.

Each of them has a lamp and of course all 10 lamps are lit.

For young unmarried women, in the Middle East, to move around in the dark without carrying lamps is unthinkable!

(Slow) What might they be doing in the dark and with whom?

The 10 young women are very judicious in their behavior. All have lamps and each of the lamps is burning.

But there are differences among them half of them have brought extra oil with them in a small flask, while the other half had not taken this precaution.

The parade, winding slowly through the village, takes a bit longer than these 10 young women, in their youthful enthusiasm, anticipate.

Such things usually do the Young woman become drowsy, carefully placed their burning lamps on a window ledge or some other appropriate sheltered place and doze off inside or outside the house.

Finally the front of the parade enters the alley and the cry goes out, "Behold the bridegroom. Come out to meet him."

Guests and the family still in the house rush into the street.

The 10 young women arise quickly, recognize that some time has passed and begin to "service their lamps."

The loose unattached wicks must be adjusted, and the oil reserves inside the lamps replenished.

To their horror, five of the women suddenly realize their lamps are almost out of olive oil and they have no reserves.

The other five take out their little clay flasks and calmly replenish their lamps.

The Five foolish women crowd around them demanding oil.

Politely and no doubt firmly they are in effect told, "We do not have enough for you and ourselves-go to the dealers and buy more!"

No doubt irritated and sputtering, the five stomp off to beg, borrow or buy a bit of oil.

Everyone knows everyone in such villages, so acquiring a little oil from someone is not a problem-even in the middle of the night

In the meantime, the groom and his new bride arrive and the entire crowd sweeps into the house (P) and the door is shut after all, it is the middle of the night.

In the final scene the shortsighted crowd of five women finally acquire some oil, get their lamps working again and arrive back at the house.

"Sir/Lord! Open to us!" They shout through the door the groom reply "I do not know you."

As is often the case, in the parables, the reader of the parable is left hanging.

Does the bridegroom relent and let them in or not?

In the Middle East the word no is never an answer, rather it is a pause in the negotiations.

But in this instance it seems "I do not know you" is the last word.

What then is the story all about? On the ethical level Jesus appears to be saying four things:

First. The importance and worth of women is implied in this parable, this could have been a parable about 10 young men.

The Previous story in Matthew's Gospel is an account of a master and two male servants one noble and the other ignoble.

By contrast this story is about women, not men and there are 10 of them, not 2.

Why so? Well, in the Gospels, the church is always feminine: the Bride of Christ.

Thus it is appropriate that Jesus has chosen women to act the part of the membership of the church both wise and foolish.

According to some Rabbinical Historians; At that time in the Middle East they required 10 Jewish males to form a company for the celebration of the Passover.

And 10 males were also required for a valid wedding ceremony.

By choosing 10 women, Jesus is trying to compensate for the gender gap in the religious culture of his day.

The worth of women is clearly affirmed by the composition of the story.

Second, there is the question of borrowed resources the faithful borrow many things from each other.

But they cannot borrow their own preparations for the coming of the kingdom.

Commitment and the discipleship that follows can be neither loaned nor borrowed.

Each believer must participate in the kingdom with his or her own resources.

Third, is the long haul, life in the kingdom of God requires commitment to the long haul.

Advance planning is necessary and reserves must be on hand.

There is neither instant discipleship nor instant maturity in the fullness of the kingdom.

The 5 wise women knew it might be a long night and prepared accordingly.

Fourth is the reaction to failure, when things go wrong, due to poor judgment and other inadequacies, the resulting problems cannot be resolved by shouting orders at neighbors or at the Lord.

As exhibited by the foolish women when short of oil they demanded from their friends, "Give us some oil!"

When they arrived late and found the door locked they cried to the bridegroom "Lord! Lord! Open the door!" These five women are like the rich man in the story of Lazarus, who in life mistreated Lazarus day after day.

They both died and the rich man found himself in Hades while the Angels took Lazarus to the side of Abraham.

The rich man then began giving orders he commanded Abraham to send Lazarus down with a drink of water because he the rich man was thirsty.

When that did not work, he made a second demand, which was, "Send Lazarus to my brothers to warn them."

The rich man expected Abraham to carry out these orders.

Lazarus was expected to jump at the chance of becoming either a table waiter or a messenger boy for the very man who had neglected him for years!

In the kingdom of God, barking orders at others is not an acceptable way to try to resolve problems created by our own inadequacies.

That is the Ethical Level of the Parable but there is a more distinctively theological level to the story as well.

On that level Jesus appears also to be sharing with us these things:

1. There is a challenge and a warning related to his second coming.

The story clearly looks forward to the consummation of all things; when the Messiah comes to his own and his own receive him at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Jesus knows that some who come to the banquet, who are deliberately waiting for his arrival, will not be ready when it happens.

For each believer, on a personal level, that meeting with the Lord will occur at the time of death.

2. The kingdom has a door that can and does close for all who are committed to the host of the banquet; the door to the banquet is open.

But near the end of the parable that door is closed the Lord shares this truth with us concerning the last days.

Many will say to me on that day and “Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name and in your name cast out demons and in your name perform many miracles. And then I will declare to them. “I never knew you.”

The foolish virgins who stand for unfaithful disciples reveal that religious failure will suffer eternal punishment.

3. This parable is also a warning that the time of the arrival the bridegroom is unknown and that speculation regarding the hour is pointless.

The enormous amount of energy that in certain Christian circles is poured into such speculation is here declared misguided.

The Scriptures tell us: "Of that day or that hour no one knows" (Mark 13:32).

4. Finally there is Christology. The parable also provides information about the person of Jesus.

Jesus is the returning bridegroom who will arrive triumphantly at the end of the age.

Be mature in the Faith, beloved Blessed are those whose lamps are faithfully kept burning as they watch and wait for his appearance.

Be Prepared, let your light so shine that your Father in Heaven is glorified.

Be Ready Be Ready for The Cry at Midnight. Amen and Amen!