

*Texts: Matthew 25:1-14*

*Subject: Ten Bridesmaids*

*Theme: The Main Thing*

*Fourth Sunday in Lent; March 31, 2019, Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from our Father in heaven and the Lord Jesus who is the Christ. Amen.

My dear sister Erin loves hiking. About two years ago, after having never hiked in her life, she decided she would hike the Pacific Crest Trail. This is a big deal - about 200 people attempt to hike the full PCT each season. Most usually start at the Mexican border in April and end on the Canadian border in September. She was going to start with just the Oregon portion of the trail. So, Erin went and visited her friends in Colorado who had done a bit of the trail themselves, and they did some practice hikes. She gave her notice at work, sold most of her belongings, found a place for her cat to stay, and headed out to the West coast for a month of hiking. She had everything she needed. She prepared with all the right gear, the lightweight backpack, tent, sleeping bag, survival knife, matches, those special walking sticks you need those right? She had all the stuff - everything you need for such a trip. She knew this time of year, there might be fires in the area, but it was a particularly bad year for wildfires. This meant she had to trek around the fires, take alternate routes, hitch a ride here and there to get around the blazes, and get back on the trail. It wasn't how she expected things to go, but she had to deal with the unexpected. It was a life changing experience, and I know she's already planning a return trip.

But the truth is, she didn't have everything she needed. She was certainly not self-sufficient. She came straight from her trip to Las Vegas, (to do laundry, I'm sure) and shared the stories about the rest stops along the trail. Those who go share the saying, "the trail provides." She told us all about the "trail angels" who show up along

the way with supplies, snacks, (and beers) for worn out hikers. Some have even found foot doctors and dentists who provide services for no fees. Without the trail angels, Erin might have found herself stranded, lost, or without needed supplies.

Most of us have found ourselves without everything we need at some point in time. So we might relate a bit more to the you women in this gospel reading who didn't bring enough oil to wait for the arrival of the bridegroom. It's a bit out of context for twenty-first century Las Vegas, a city that never lacks for light. In first century Palestine, it was customary for the whole town to accompany the wedding party to the home of the groom. The 'wedding' as we know it was a bit different - it wasn't a big event really, no exchange of vows, but the banquet that followed would last for days! It was tradition to stay awake and wait for the groom to show up - kind of a contest, and a bonus if you could catch the bridal party sleeping. Staying awake was the name of the game.

This strange parable of Jesus may prompt some questions. Like, "Why didn't five of the young women bring enough oil?" "Where could they buy more in the middle of the night?" "Couldn't they have shared lamps with the other five?" "Might they have just stayed close and huddled under the five lamps that were lit?" "Isn't this a missed opportunity for some trail angels to show up with some oil?" Seems like a good idea. The five were foolish to leave - since it was at that moment the bridegroom showed up. They missed out. They're off getting oil, and not focused on *the main thing*.

Jesus seems to share this parable to remind hearers that the Kingdom of God is near - is truly present in the living Word right there with them - they should be paying attention, be vigilant - stay awake.

Even in our own time and place - we are often the foolish ones. We get distracted so easily. We are lulled to sleep by our comfortable way of life. We think we have everything we need, and we're prepared. So we get complacent. We think we've got it all - or not enough - so we don't have to worry about feeding those who are hungry. We trust in American exceptionalism - we think we're special - and those in other nations are just left to fend for themselves. We've got things to do and places to be, so we don't have time to share a word of hope with someone in despair, afraid, or facing mental illness. We've got oils for all occasions - neighbors better get their own. We don't worry about our lamps going out - but the truth is we're already asleep. Resting on our abundance, our focus is pulled from *the main thing* we don't want to miss: the good news of Jesus.

I'm not in the clear. Please don't think I'm not in the same boat - I'm just as focused on my calendar, and trying to be in twenty places at once, I forget others, I fail to show up when needed, and am often unprepared.

There is grace here - Jesus gives this parable to wake us up to the reality that the bridegroom will come - and *has come* in the Son of God, Jesus. He is the one who has freed us from our complacency, has awakened us to life, has called us through the Word to a living faith that trusts in God's grace and mercy in Jesus. Because of Jesus we have everything we need. Because of the gospel we have received the invitation to the banquet - and the worst of us miserable sinners are seated in the VIP section. There's an urgency here - as he moves toward Jerusalem and the cross, Jesus says to stay focused! Stay awake! Live in faith!

This good news is *the main thing* - we are saved from our selfishness, our failures, and our mistakes, through the cross. The place where Jesus suffered and died is where you can find your own sins. Trusting in this promise is life changing - it means my life is assured - I am freed from having to wonder if God's love is for me. I'm freed from worrying or even thinking about what happens when I die - I take comfort in the Word of God. It tells me that I'm free to go and make disciples - to share this Word with my children, to study the Bible and discuss these things in the coffee shop, in the bar, in the parking lot, in the fine barbecue establishments of Las Vegas.

Sometimes I forget - I'm running through the day and don't have time, or thinking of something else, or late for an appointment. I miss the cues, struggle with my own summations or just plain don't want to talk to people about life and salvation in Jesus Christ. That's bad, right? I have to confess that. I should be prepared, and have everything I need at all times. I have to take that to God and trust that I'm where I need to be and I'm doing what I need to do.

Today we get a chance to welcome our neighbors here for a meal. My prayer is that we all stay awake and take advantage of the opportunity to meet some folks who have maybe heard about this place. Maybe they've been here for a meeting, maybe they've walked or driven by this building for years - even decades. I pray that you'll get a chance to talk to someone and get to know them just a bit. And if they ask why we're doing this, you'll get to tell them that we love this community. You could tell them that we just wanted to have a party. You can tell them that Jesus calls us to feed hungry people. You don't have to tell them anything. Your presence tells them that there is a reason we're here.

Today is not about the food. it's not about the music. It's not about the bounce house - but I'll be in there at some point. It's not about the meat - which will be wonderful. It's not about what we do. It's about *the main thing* - the gospel. Each one of us, each one who shows up here today (and each one that doesn't) is known and loved by a creator who came into time and history take on the pain and suffering of the world, and to bring about a new creation. Jesus came, died, and rose again to new life for you.

This is *the main thing*. And it *is* life changing.

Amen.