

“All in the Timing”
Sunday, November 12th, 2017
23rd Sunday after Pentecost

 **Matthew 25:1-13 (CEB)**

[On Screen]

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks, be to God.

[2ND Service: Affirmation of Faith]

We do not like to wait.

Whether we're on hold waiting to speak with a human customer service representative; slowing to 25 m.p.h. in a school zone; enduring a sluggish Internet connection; or thumbing through old magazines in the office of a doctor who does not keep timely appointments...

Delay *frustrates* us because we are so accustomed to a fast-paced world.

Because of this frustration, we value faster communications, travel, food, answers to prayer, and weight loss.

We don't want much...but, we want it right now!

Let us pray... Lord, we seem to be very impatient people sometimes. We are not interested in waiting or in preparing ourselves for you. This morning we come, asking that you will help us engage the images in this parable and learn how important it is for us to learn patience. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

[MESSAGE]

“Are we there yet?” may be a child's question from the back seat of the car, but adults and children alike long for life on their own accelerated timetable.

Patience may be a virtue that is just out of our reach.

And we dare not ask God for patience; He will surely give us circumstances where patience is required.

The thing is, we really do need to learn patience, especially when we're talking about waiting for God.

It is clear that God operates on a different timetable from ours and, in fact, in a whole different reality.

We seek the Kingdom of God, yet we realize that it is delayed until a time in the future that we cannot know.

Our culture pressures us to move faster and faster, while God encourages us to slow down and wait for blessings that are found in quiet moments and stillness.

It's no wonder that we often feel like our timing is just a little bit off; something isn't right, and we can't put our finger on it.

The images in this parable may be distracting from the overall message of the parable today.

The concept of bridesmaids waiting around all night for the groom to appear doesn't make sense in our culture.

“Ladies in waiting” are just not likely to happen.

And I can't imagine any groom brave enough to show up late for his own wedding and still expect that wedding to take place.

Have you met *“bridezilla”*?!

So, what new image might we use to help us appreciate Jesus' message today?

Maybe all we need is to look right here in this room.

As impatient as we may be, we are still waiting for Jesus to return and fulfill God's promise.

What we learn from this parable is that waiting is not a passive thing, sitting around doing nothing.

Waiting is an active verb for the church.

We use the waiting time to prepare.

You see, the *“wise”* and the *“foolish”* represent those who have true faith and those who do not.

The wise are prepared for delay, so that, when their faith in the groom's return is tested, they are able to sustain their faith.

Imagine that Jesus' followers believed that His return was immanent; that it would happen in their lifetime.

We are now over 2,000 years removed from the promise and we are still waiting.

How easy it would be to lose our faith in His return and give up doing the work of the church.

But, in the midst of life's joys and pain, ease and adversity, intrigue and boredom, the faith of the wise continues to be enough.

They keep shining their light brightly for all to see.

They continue in community, study, and prayer.

They keep doing works of mercy, offering forgiveness, and spreading justice and peace.

The wise remain convinced that, one day, each one of us will be transformed and become fully reconciled to God.

Holding onto this hope, with the Holy Spirit's guidance, the wise have built into their lives the disciplines and habits of a lifetime spent sharing hope and living *as if* they **are** citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The image of the locked door at the end of the parable should give us pause.

We need to realize that living in this land of endless opportunities does not reflect God's reality.

We may think we have all the time in the world to mend broken relationships; to offer a word of gratitude or forgiveness; to spend time with a child; to replace a bad habit with a good one; or to deepen our relationship with God.

There's plenty of time for us to slow down and follow Christ; what could possibly go wrong?

We see that the foolish in this story were not ready and had to scramble to try to make up for their foolishness.

But, when they returned, now prepared for the party, they find the door has been locked.

As with so many things in our lives, the essence is all in the timing.

The wise live their faith without procrastination; with good works and acts of faith in God, they prepare for an unknown, but secure future.

The foolish assume a bright future, but do little to prepare for it.

Now is the time for active discipleship, and every moment we can hear the clock ticking and the closing of certain doors.

Christ summons us to new life, stronger commitment, leaving behind false idols, actively waiting in renewed hope and true faith.

The Messiah **will come** at the right time – which is so much better than coming at the convenient time or on our time.

Are we paying attention to time wasted and time left?

Are we considering the fleeting nature of time and its unpredictability?

Have we taken the time to compare God's schedule
to our own and really thought about what the
"right time" means?

Time's ticking away...What's next?

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.**