



Thirty-second Sunday Ordinary Time 2005

Wisdom 6:12-16 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18 Matthew 25: 1-12

A parable is a story that usually requires us to wrestle a little. Because it is not straight forward it can be heard at different levels. Sometimes we hear nothing but an interesting story. At other times we are captured by some point which seems to be saying something significant to me, personally.

Once ten young women, sisters and cousins of the bridegroom set out to meet him and accompany him on the ritual journey of bringing the bride home. The groom had to make a ceremonial journey to the bride's home from which her father officially handed her over to the husband. She was ritually "given away".

The women carried decorative lamps. According to custom the father-in-law and the husband spent time negotiating the dowry. In this story the haggling process went on a long time and the women, waiting outside, fell asleep.

At midnight things began to happen, the little procession formed. It was dark but some of the women had anticipated a wait and had come prepared with extra oil. They took out their little flasks and got their lamps burning again. The other women hadn't thought about the possibility of a wait so their lamps soon burned out.

Now the dilemma! Do the wise share their oil and have a short burst of light for all? Or do they consider the purpose of the lamps and ensure that there is some light for the entire journey.

The prepared women opt for the second solution but they encourage the others to search for another supplier.

The foolish leave but the search takes time and when they get back the doors of the bridegroom's house have been closed. Their lack of preparation has cost them a party and they have embarrassed their relative.

Who is the bridegroom? God? Israel?

How do you read the story from a disciple's point of view?

The Book of Wisdom, like much scriptural writing, portrays Wisdom as a woman. In our passage today Wisdom is beautiful, very attractive, and those who seek her will have no difficulty finding her. She is to be found at dawn, in the workplace, and in the quiet of the evening. She is everywhere if we take the trouble to seek her out.

When Matthew told this parable he saw Jesus as the bridegroom so he had his own interpretation of the parable. For Matthew the bridegroom, Jesus, is the Son of Man,

that figure who is associated with the *end times*. This provides a different dilemma for us as it did the early Christians.

Some believed that the end of the world was imminent. This belief coloured the early communities' attitude in some areas like marriage and ministry. As time passed and nothing happened the people had to do some re-thinking around their traditional texts. They returned to the prophet Daniel and his vision of the *end times*.

I saw one like a son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven; when he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, he received dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and people of every language served him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away.

We have heard and read about the end of the world. What does it mean to us? We can pick a date 23rd of June 2010. Or we can see it as a symbol of fulfilment beyond our way of measuring time.

The most important point of the story is watchfulness, and that implies wisdom. So where is our focus? On some unknown future?

Or are we busy now, doing our best to bring about the partnership of God and our community for the good of all.

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