

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer; Amen.

I don't know about you but following the news of the mass shooting that took place inside a church in Texas last weekend, killing twenty-six people and injuring twenty more, I have had trouble shutting my mind off in the quiet spaces of my day. I have thought and prayed over and over for the families, some losing as many as three generations. I have thought and prayed for a town who has lost seven percent of its population. I have thought and prayed for the family of the shooter. And I have wondered couldn't they have done something to be better prepared? Why wasn't there a plan in place? And then I realized something; we have no plan. If an active shooter were to come into our sanctuary, we would have nowhere to go, and I have no way to protect you, my church family, or my children.

All over the country this week my colleagues have been having this exact conversation, acknowledging that we have no plan. That this particular mass shooting has hit too close to home. We have voiced, with some hesitance, that it has made us feel unsafe in a space we have always come to for comfort and assurance. It has made us feel vulnerable and exposed, recognizing that someone could come in here, in a trusted space and hurt us and the people we love and serve. So what do we do? How can we be better prepared? Or can we?

Preparation is something that has always been important to my family. I grew up with the motto, "Things will only go as well as you prepare them to go." In my first call Pastor Lynn would often say, "You either prepare for an event with 500 people or you prepare for an event for 5. It's all in the preparation." My brother was a boy scout and of course their motto is, "Always be prepared." Preparation requires advanced planning. It requires thought. And it requires attention to detail.

Today in our Gospel lesson the story of the ten bridesmaids is all about preparation; or lack of preparation. It seems to be a theme in this section of Matthew. Just prior to this parable there is a story about the wise and faithful slave who was hard at work when the master arrived as opposed to the self-indulgent slave who was mistreating others and who was surprised by the master's return. And following our parable for today is the parable of the master who entrusts his property to his slaves and expects a diligent investment of it when he returns. Of course, similarly to our parable, no one knows when it is that the master will return. And in both parables the slaves' faithfulness will be determined by what they accomplish while the master is away.

The bridesmaids are charged with getting ready to go and meet their bridegroom. Five of the bridesmaids prepare for their meeting only. The other five prepare for their meeting plus the possibility that the bridegroom may be delayed. The last line of the parable, "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour," suggests the bridesmaids were not sufficiently prepared for their meeting. They should have thought it through and anticipated that the bridegroom could have been delayed, or running late.

You may be thinking, "at this rate we will have to ALWAYS be ready for Christ to come." And that may cause anxiety or it may seem overwhelming and exhausting. But if you notice all the bridesmaids, the foolish and the wise were asleep when the bridegroom came. The difference was that the wise bridesmaids anticipated there could be a wait and as a result had extra oil for their lamps, while the foolish bridesmaids did not.

When I read this parable, I can relate to striving to be prepared, but I have to be honest that this parable doesn't really seem to connect to me and to my current situation. And as I thought about it and prayed over it this week in preparation for this morning I kept asking myself why? And finally I got it. It's difficult to relate to this parable because it's about waiting! And

who in the world waits for anything? If I want to know the score of a football game, I hit the ESPN app I have programmed for my particular teams on my phone and I have the score. If I want to know what the weather will be when I travel to my mom's house for thanksgiving, I hit a button on my phone and it tells me. If I'm in a hurry and want to order my dinner while I'm driving down the road I can call the restaurant when I leave church and it will be ready when I get there. If I don't want to wait in lines to do my Christmas shopping I can order things off of amazon and in two days they will arrive at my doorstep without me having to get out of my pajamas! When I was growing up we didn't get to watch Christmas movies until at least after Thanksgiving because there wasn't Netflix where I can instantly access a wide variety of movies at any time I want. Everything now-a-days is instantaneous, but with that constant immediate gratification something is lost.

Today Jesus is asking us to imagine ourselves as a person who anticipates his return, a person in wait. He's asking us to imagine what it will be like when he arrives and he promises us the reward will be worth our wait. Do you see it? Do you see the restoration of Israel? Do you see the lion lying down with the lamb? Do you see no more tears or pain or stress or anxiety? Do you see the new creation? Do you see the darkness melting away? Do you see the marriage feast between God and his people beginning, initiating a new way of life, a new normal? Imagine the joy and the excitement and the awe and the wonder. Jesus is asking us to wait in hopeful anticipation of the fulfillment of those promises, of the restoration of all creation and peace on earth.

We are a people of hope. Sometimes, like when there are mass shootings, it's easy to lose sight of that and become only focused on the here and the now, but that's not what God's people do. We keep our eyes on Jesus and we pray and we hope and we expect that he will keep his

promises and that one day he will return for his people. And until that day we will actively wait. We will wait sighing and groaning and lamenting and praying BUT remembering and trusting in God's promise, he will come again. And all will be right with the world.

Advent has never been favorite season. I'm not so good at the waiting AND Christmas is my favorite season of all. But today I leave you with the words of a hymn entitled, "Wake, Awake the Night is Flying." And although we may not like it, we are an advent people. So hear Jesus' words to you today, "Wake, awake, for night is flying," The watchmen on the heights are crying; "Awake, Jerusalem, arise!" Midnight hears the welcome voices And at the thrilling cry rejoices: "Oh, where are ye, ye virgins wise? The Bridegroom comes, awake! Your lamps with gladness take! Hallelujah! With bridal care Yourselves prepare To meet the Bridegroom, who is near." Zion hears the watchmen singing, And all her heart with joy is springing, She wakes, she rises from her gloom; For her Lord comes down all-glorious, The strong in grace, in truth victorious, Her Star is ris'n, her Light is come. "Now come, Thou Blessed One, Lord Jesus, God's own Son, Hail! Hosanna! The joyful call We answer all And follow to the nuptial hall." Now let all the heav'ns adore Thee, Let men and angels sing before Thee, With harp and cymbal's clearest tone. Of one pearl each shining portal, Where, dwelling with the choir immortal, We gather round Thy radiant throne. No vision ever brought, No ear hath ever caught, Such great glory; Therefore will we Eternally Sing hymns of praise and joy to Thee.

So again I ask the question I began with, what's our plan? How can we be better prepared for someone who would come in here and tries to harm us? It's simple-our plan is to wait. Our plan is to trust in God's plan, knowing that he promises to return for his people. I invite you into a period of watchfulness and hopefulness. "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." Amen.