Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost
November 8, 2026
9:30 AM

Text: Matthew 25:1-13
Theme: It Will Be Like This: Keep Awake

[prayer]

18 Doom to those who desire the day of the Lord!
Why do you want the day of the Lord?
It is darkness, not light;
19 as if someone fled from a lion,
and was met by a bear;
or sought refuge in a house,
rested a hand against the wall,
and was bitten by a snake.
20 Isn't the day of the Lord darkness, not light;
all dark with no brightness in it?

24 But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:18-20, 24 CEB)

So says the Prophet Amos on this twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost.

He asks a good question. Why *do* we want the day of the Lord? Why *do* we pray and long for His kingdom to come?

Perhaps because we are looking for:

- Peace in a world of violence.
- Abundance in a world of lack.
- Justice in a world of injustice.
- Mercy in a world of punishment.
- Comfort in a world of suffering.
- Certainty in a world of uncertainty.

We long for God's will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven. And so, we conjure images of what our personal heavens will be like, and we pray that God will make that image our reality sooner rather than later.

But Amos's vision of the day of the Lord is not comforting. He describes a day of darkness, not light; a day of judgment. Jesus's vision is not much better. The disciples ask, "What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?" (Matt 24:3) and Jesus responds by telling a strange story about ten bridesmaids with oil lamps and a groom who is late to his own wedding and then shuts the door on half the bridesmaids and pretends he does not know them.

Clear as mud, right?

I have a lot of questions. Who are these bridesmaids? Why do they have lamps and why do half of them hoard their oil? That behavior flies in the face of the radical generosity Jesus commands. Who is the groom and why is he late to his wedding? Also, why is he so *mean*? Granted, I do not know much about the wedding customs in first-century Palestine, but in my opinion this groom is a terrible host. And where is the bride in this story?

The conventional interpretation of this parable goes like this: We are the bridesmaids, Jesus is the groom, and he can come back at any moment. We will all fall asleep, but only the wise will have made the necessary spiritual preparations to pass the eschatological test. So, make ready. Be prepared. Be like the Boy Scouts, but for Jesus.

But here's the thing: Jesus doesn't give us a checklist for the apocalypse. There are no merit badges for eternity. Disciples are not doomsday preppers.

Instead, Jesus gives us stories. Stories about people working out their faith with fear and trembling. And what those stories reveal are truths about our relationships with each other, with God, and with ourselves.

These relationships are where we encounter the divine. Remaining present to the presence of God in one another is a necessary spiritual discipline for followers of Christ. We stay present by attending to our stories – paying attention to how and where God is showing up in our lives and the lives of our neighbors.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will be constantly crossing our paths and canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions."[1]

We do not know when Christ will return. But we do know that we catch a glimpse of him in the people and needs that surround us. The kingdom of God is *entos hymon*: "in the midst of" you, "among" you, "within" you. Which is to say, the kingdom of God is already here. For Jesus, we enter eternity by living with eternal, kingdom values in the present. We don't save our hope, peace, joy, and love for the end of all things. We cultivate those values now.

What, then, does it look like to keep watch, to be prepared, to keep our lamps lit?

In the Psalms, oil is a metaphor for righteousness and good deeds (Ps 119:105). Deeds of love and mercy in obedience to the Great Commandment are what will count most at the *parousia*, when we will meet Christ once and for all. We must always be feeding the lamps of our spirits with the oil of love and mercy. Jesus tells us to take our lamps and set them on a lampstand so that the light of our lives will shine before all people. "You are the light of the world" (Matt 5:14). We are called to live lives that reflect the values of the kingdom, lives that embody Jesus's Sermon on the Mount.

This is not about making ourselves ready for a single moment in time. Readiness is the practice of discipleship, and discipleship, in the words of Eugene Peterson, is a long obedience in the same direction. Do we have the discipline to follow the Way of Jesus – the way of peace, mercy, justice, love, humility – day after day, year after year, even as the bridegroom remains delayed?

Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes wrote this poem on Election Day last week, and I think it captures well the meaning of Jesus's parable:

[1] From *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*.

I will vote today,
but nothing will change yet.

The bridegroom of justice
will not come tomorrow or next year
or possibly in my lifetime.

We are fighting for our grandchildren.
The lamps of quick results will go out soon.

Think of those of old who did not give up
for our sake, not their own.

We stock up on the oil of patience,
endurance and persistence.

The Spirit flowing through us
is the oil for the long haul.[2]

Friends, eternity is today. So, keep your lamps lit.

Amen.

[2] Written by Rev. Steve Garnass-Holmes (https://unfoldinglight.net/2026/11/03/long-haul/)