

November 12, 2023: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Twenty Fourth Sunday after Pentecost~

“We do not know when the time comes.”

Our services can be found on our website at www.barrechurch.com

Scripture Reading: Matthew 25 v 1-13

1. Introduction:

Many of us have been traveling by car, train, bus, or air, and we are aware that when we must catch that bus or train, or plane, we need to be there on time. We must be ready to go, or they won't wait for us. To be ready is not everyone's gift in life! Some are a little more relaxed and others are rather rigid when it comes to preparing for something. Yet others are somewhat in-between. To be ready for that trip, it involves various activities, from getting the tickets, packing, ensuring the house is taken care of, whilst away, and so forth. There are numerous things in life that we must be prepared for. In some cases, there can be some flexibility, or something that cannot be anticipated, but for the most part it is expected that we be ready to go somewhere or do something.

2. The Bridegroom and the Ten Women:

In our passage we read about a bridegroom and ten women whose role it was to usher the bridegroom into the wedding banquet as he was arriving. They carried their torches, which were lit, and they also had extra oil, just in case the torch holder was empty. In this case, we see ten women, five of them fully prepared with their torches and enough oil, and five women who were not as prepared. Meanwhile the bridegroom was delayed, and the women all fell asleep before the bridegroom's arrival. After they woke up, the five went to purchase more oil, and upon their return they were too late to enter the wedding banquet hall. The door was closed, and the bridegroom told them he did not know them!

3. The Coming of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven:

Jesus is telling this parable, to illustrate the second coming of Christ, the Parousia. He says the Kingdom of Heaven is like this story of the ten women and the bridegroom. Its real focus is on the day and hour of His return that is unknown to the disciples, the angels and even Himself.

This parable ends with the words, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour (of My return).” Only God knows the time of the Parousia. What they, the disciples need to do, though, is to keep watch, like these women were doing, while waiting for the groom. But more, they need to be ready, like the five women were while they were keeping watch. These five women seem to be selfish, not sharing their oil with the other five, but they came prepared for this very special ceremonial event. They must have spent days thinking about this and investigated everything they had to do, while the other five may have been a little too careless and not fully prepared for the upcoming event.

The long delay of the bridegroom was not expected, but he did not stay away. He came, but he came at an unexpected time. And this is what Jesus is illustrating in His parable, that His coming will happen certainly, but there may be delays along the way, and therefore everyone needs to wait for it, prepare for it, and be ready for it, because it will happen at an unexpected time. The five prepared women point to the spiritual preparedness the disciples and all followers of Christ need to have as we are waiting for His second coming. The spiritual preparedness, says R.T. France, is not what someone else can give you. No family member, loved one, colleague, or neighbor can give this for us. It is our personal response to our God, and each individual needs to work on that preparedness. Only those who are prepared will then be allowed into the Kingdom of Heaven, like this wedding banquet. The Parousia will come at a time we do not expect, and the door will be closed to the ones who are not ready.

4. Conclusion:

The Kingdom of Heaven is on the one hand, a mystery, because it involves the deepest secrets and thoughts of God. But it is also transparent about the conditions of the environment created by God where everything is good, kind loving, and peaceful. It is the place where God waits for all of us to enter. While we do not know the exact place and when all of this will happen, what is expected from us is not really that complicated, because the voice of God speaks through the pages of the Biblical text about what God desires from all of us, which is justice, righteousness, mercy, and humility, and loving God and neighbor as oneself. We will come to that place at the end of our earthly journey. To be in the presence of God will be an awesome moment of grace and glory. May God help each one of us and more of us in this world to get ready, in the same way we prepare to go on that trip. May God help us to let go of things and ways that are counter

to what God expects from us, and embrace a life pleasing to God. It is a beautiful journey to be with God. It is a journey not to be feared, but in our surrender to God, we will and are already experiencing the blessings from God's heart. Amen!