

“READY OR NOT – HERE I COME”

Pastor Mike Corwin

TEXT: MATTHEW 25:1-13

GOD’S WORD: PSALM 78:1-7

I - HIDE & SEEK:

With a 17 month old little one in the house I am watching the progression of children’s games again that I lived with my children and my grandchildren. There’s the ever popular run and giggle where you run away from the adult and when wait for the adult to catch you. I’ve noticed this is most often played during the time you are trying to change a diaper or put clothes on her. Next we learned to play king of the mountain. This is where you discover the child is part monkey and can climb furniture and anything else she shouldn’t because if she falls it’s going to hurt. Then we graduated to peek-a-boo. A harmless game where she covers her eyes and waits for you to pretend you can’t see her and then she peeks out through her fingers and giggles. This was soon developed into putting towels and blankets over her head and walking around the house until she bumped in to things.

The newest game seems to be Hide and Seek. Usually this is played by older kids while the one who is “it” hides their face and counts to ten and then yells out “Ready or not – here I come.” Our little one doesn’t play this part of the game, you don’t know you’re “it” until you just notice she isn’t in your sight anymore. Then you panic and go in search of her. Luckily she has two favorite spots. One is in the center cabinet of our entertainment center where she watches you frantically searching for her through the glass doors. The other is in our bedroom closet where she leaves the bi-fold doors cracked so she can see you coming and again give her normal reaction when you find her...she giggles.

I see this game being played in this morning’s Gospel text. Hide and seek and we’re all it. The trouble is...it’s not a game. It’s a matter of life and death. Eternal life and death.

II – TEXT:

Matthew 25:1-13 (NLT)

¹“Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³The five who were foolish didn’t take enough olive oil for their lamps, ⁴but the other five were wise enough to take along extra oil. ⁵When the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. ⁶“At midnight they

were roused by the shout, 'Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out and meet him!' ⁷ "All the bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps. ⁸ Then the five foolish ones asked the others, 'Please give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out.'⁹ "But the others replied, 'We don't have enough for all of us. Go to a shop and buy some for yourselves.'¹⁰ "But while they were gone to buy oil, the bridegroom came. Then those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was locked. ¹¹ Later, when the other five bridesmaids returned, they stood outside, calling, 'Lord! Lord! Open the door for us!' ¹² "But he called back, 'Believe me, I don't know you!'¹³ "So you, too, must keep watch! For you do not know the day or hour of my return.

The main lesson most learned from this passage, and preached about from this text, is that we need to be ready. We celebrate in many ways the fact that Jesus is coming back. He himself told us that he would return in all of his power and glory. Every time we celebrate communion we do it to remember the sacrifice that was given for us and then to celebrate the promise of his expectant return. We are told to practice this sacrament of the church until he does come back so we never lose sight of the hope and promise that he will. This passage uses the imagery that Jesus is the bridegroom and we – the church – are the bride.

Sadly it appears that part of the lesson is that not everyone will make it to the wedding. Not everyone will join in the celebration on that great day. In the passage Jesus gives us ten brides. He says that five of them were wise enough to be prepared while five of them were not. It points out that the bridegroom, Jesus, didn't come when everyone expected him to arrive and they evidently got tired of waiting so they fell asleep until they were woken up with the shout that he was coming now, was almost here. The one's who were prepared for his arrival got up and filled their lamps and lit them up so they were ready. The ones who weren't prepared had to go and get supplies and while they were trying to do what they needed to do and return they found out it was too late and the celebration had started without them. Not only that but the door was closed and locked and they couldn't get in. When they called to Jesus to open the door he told them to go away...he didn't even know them.

I know that I preach about Salvation a lot. That I proclaim the Gospel every time I get the opportunity in one form or another. I can even imagine some of you are getting a little tired of it. But that's my job! My calling is to boldly proclaim the love and salvation of God through his Son Jesus Christ and make sure you hear it. To make sure you are ready for the celebration when he comes back or when you die, whichever happens first. I can even hear you thinking that you've assured me over and over that you know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior and you or I have absolutely nothing to worry about.

But as you look at this text you find out that the ten bridesmaids, the ones who were ready and the ones who weren't got a little lazy in their devotion to the coming of the bridegroom. It says "they fell asleep." That's why I keep telling you over and over about Jesus, because I don't want any of you to get lazy or fall asleep, or not to be prepared for his return or for your meeting him when you

close your eyes here for the last time. I don't want you showing up for your celebration until the doors of the Kingdom have already been shut.

III – HOPE:

So what do we do to stay awake? If we have already accepted Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior (there's this week's mention of the Gospel) then how do we stay awake until his return? How do we stay prepared? I think that to, is answered in this passage of Scripture.

We are called to live in the hope and promise of his return, the hope and promise of our Salvation, the hope and promise of our being a member of the Kingdom of God. We live knowing that the real party can't get started until he arrives. We live in the tension of what's been promised, but what's not yet. The arrival of Jesus. We live knowing he's coming and will arrive, we just don't know when. But when he comes he's bringing the party with him!

We live expectantly and hopeful. Knowing that the God who created the world continues to love the world and continues to create until the time when the process of creation will be complete. When the time for his Son to return arrives and all of creation will be set back in order. In the meantime God will continue to redeem and save the world by coming into it with the love and grace we find in Jesus Christ.

Right now in our history it is a time where people are frightened. They are upset and worried about the condition of the world and society. They are scared because it looks like we are headed in the wrong direction. Freedom, justice, and compassion all seem to be fragile commodities in the faces of oppression, injustice, violence, torture, and other intolerances we have seen played out. But we still have to realize the hope and promise of God to restore it all through Jesus someday. Living in hope doesn't mean we are immune to the harsh realities of history in this day. It means that we live in that state of "confident expectation" trusting that the Lord of all history, from beginning to end, continues to come in to our lives with compassion, redemption, and hope.

IV – DISCIPLESHIP:

While we wait for his arrival, while we wait for the party, we need to not only stay awake, we need to make sure we are prepared. We need to make sure we have enough oil in our lamp that it's shining brightly for Jesus. I don't want Jesus to have to look for me, I want him to see me because of his light I'm shining out for him to others.

The Kingdom of heaven calls us now to a time of active discipleship. It seems that every moment of the present time in history we can sense the ticking of the clock of time and see doors of life closed to some. Jesus gave us the answers to a world full of oppression, of hate, of racism, of politics gone bad, of poverty, and all the other problems we face. He called it LOVE and he called all of his followers to live it and share it with others. His wish is for all ten of the bridesmaids to make it to

the party, not just half. We are called to realize that knowledge, faith, and love are tools for living in the Kingdom now, not tools to get us into the Kingdom later. The Kingdom of heaven summons us to:

- new life,
- improved commitment,
- casting away of all false idols in our lives,
- active waiting in hope, and
- renewed vigor in faith

We need to realize that the faithful actions we do now prepares us to weather the unexpected timing of God, even as it prepares us for the heavenly wedding celebration when Jesus the bridegroom returns to claim his bride – the church – to join him in the eternal celebration of life.

How's your oil supply? Will your lamp keep burning until you meet Jesus? Do you put enough into your soul each day so the reservoir stays full and you'll never stop shining? Or have you gotten lazy in your discipleship and the oil is drying up and evaporating?

V – COME OUT, COME OUT:

At the end of the child's game of hide and seek, when the person who is it finally gives up hope of finding the ones who are still hiding, he or she yells out, "come out, come out, wherever you are." And the game ends.

No matter how long Jesus waits to return, no matter how much time is given to allow more people to find him and the Kingdom of heaven, someday the game we know as life will be over. God will determine it's time to bring everything to an end, send Jesus back to claim the Kingdom, and restore all of creation.

Someday Jesus will come in all his glory and call out to all, "come out, come out, wherever you are." The sad part is that some will not come out, some will try to stay hidden because they aren't ready for his return, and some will have the door shut and won't be allowed in with Jesus for the grand celebration because he doesn't know them since they chose not to know him.

My prayer is when that day arrives you will be wide awake and burning brightly.

AMEN