

Year A, Proper 27, Nov. 12, 2023

I wanna be ready –

Whenever I think of the kind of waiting that is described in readings like today's Gospel I'm reminded of this song by Sean Staples:

*i wanna be ready, i wanna be ready*

*i wanna be ready till my joy comes back to me*

*i wanna be ready, i wanna be ready*

*i wanna be ready when my joy comes back to me*

This is the kind of waiting that I feel like I've been doing a lot over these past several years, especially around election time – waiting for wisdom and justice to take the stage, waiting for peace and nonviolence to overwhelm my city and my world.. waiting for joy to come back to me in uncertain times.

At times like these I have wondered what it would feel like when joy returned -- would it prickle like the blood returning to numb feet that have fallen asleep? Or would it feel like shoulders that finally untensed? Or a jaw that unclenched?

Or does it feel like this – aaaaah – when I realize that while I've been waiting I've been holding my breath.

And here at St Peter's we've had our share of waiting over the past few years haven't we? You waited for an interim priest in charge to arrive. And then you waited to make her your rector. And then you had to wait to get her officially installed, which happened yesterday, not long after we installed the boilers.

Indeed our lamps were trimmed and burning, as were our hearts. It was an amazing celebration of who we are as a community, who we hope to be together. It was a taste of the Kingdom – and that was before we got to the amazing reception. Don't worry if you couldn't make it – there are left overs.

But as awesome as yesterday was, we'd be foolish to think it was the end point of all our gospel waiting. Celebrations like these are things to remember and savor; they get us through other times of waiting, which may be less exciting, less delicious. In fact, as incredible as yesterday was, it was more an act of getting ready than it was of arriving – you brought me the gifts that would empower me to be among you as rector. We at the bread of life that strengthens us for the work ahead. We were exhorted by the bishop to love beyond ourselves, deep into the world.

See also -- <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/woman-wisdom-bible>

And that's what our Gospels suggest that we do while we wait for all that we long for -- they call us to make ourselves ready for its arrival. What I love about these scriptures today is that they remind us that there is a particular quality to gospel waiting. Gospel waiting, the waiting of the follower of Jesus, requires wisdom.

Now in the scriptures Wisdom is often personified as female. And I've heard her described as the very personality of God. I grew up calling her Lady Wisdom, like Lady Liberty or Mother Necessity. I've also heard her called Woman Wisdom, and I like that better. Gospel waiting requires woman wisdom.

If you pursue the references to her through the Greek-inspired scriptures of the Old Testament like Proverbs and look through the apocrypha like the Wisdom of Solomon you'll find that Woman Wisdom is connected directly to the creative work of God. She's a figure that is rooted right in the creation, and she anticipates its ongoing needs, especially at the margins. She fashions shelters, and sets tables, and gathers the rejected ones, the lowly ones, and the ones who seek her out like King Solomon purportedly did. In Woman Wisdom, you will find a figure that withstands and understands.

In today's gospel, Wisdom stands with her lamp trimmed and burning, lighting the way to the final stop in the great procession of the wedding of God and humanity. Lighting the way requires the ability to wait now. Gospel waiting is waiting for the completion of something that has already begun, and being ready to make it visible as it arrives, to light the way for others. So they don't miss it.

That's what you do in the meantime.

These wedding attendants in Jesus's parable today remind me of runway lights that help the airplane to land, or maybe those spotlights that lead the way to the early Christmas sales. And that can take a lot of lamp oil. It can take a lot of time.

Wise commentators say that we need to be careful not to make these wise and foolish wedding attendants a metaphor for good and bad people, for God's chosen and God's rejected, for us and them.

In these immensely polarizing times this parable says be careful whom you call wise and whom you call foolish. Matthew addresses this story to one Christian community, and all of those members are fitted with lamps to make the Christ visible. But some prepare for any eventuality and others assume that they know the day and the hour when the festivities will start. The former have what they need to do the job of keeping the way lit until the wedding party arrives. And the others run out of supplies and can no longer do the task they were given to do. The former are wise, the latter are foolish. Notice that the wise

don't lord it over the foolish; they just suggest they go to the store and get more oil before it's too late.

Friends, we are all the wedding attendants at the joyful celebration of the God's union with humanity -- and we have one task: to usher in the promised inevitable and impending reign of God. And we'd be fools to pack only enough oil for this week hoping it would all be wrapped up by today. We are fitted to make way for a deeper joy, a more profound transformation.

And we don't get to say when it's going to happen, when God's design is complete, and who is going to be welcome in and who is not.

The faith that we proclaim as followers of Jesus, which we live with our bodies in Baptism and Eucharist does not say that we progress our way into the kingdom of God in linear fashion, or that we evolve ourselves through the door. It says that we lay down one life so that God can raise us to another.

As followers of Jesus, our job is to insist with our lives that another world is possible. Our job is to be ready for *that* joy to light the way to *that* door.

That's not evolution. That's resurrection. And that's God's lookout. We tend the lamps, and if we are wise we also tend to the safety and the well-being and the care of all who join us in the waiting. We care for all who are drawn to that light and all that it promises. If we are wise, we foster healing.

In the meantime we make it easier for people to be good, as the wise saint Dorothy Day would say.

So I think a really important question for today is what's in your lamp? What are you doing to keep it trimmed and burning? How do you replenish it on the off chance that your estimates of how much oil you'll need are a little off?

I have to admit that my lamp is about a quart low this morning. But these are important questions to take with us into this week and beyond.

What's in your lamp?

What are you doing to keep it trimmed and burning?

How do you replenish your reserves on the off chance that your estimates of how much oil you need are a little off?

Another way to say it; what are you doing to be ready when joy -- all the joy comes back to you?

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