

“Waiting While Participating”

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 25:1-13

Caden was absorbed in his iPad. Having downloaded a new game, he was working hard for a high score. This is why he didn't appreciate his dad telling him to play.

His dad wasn't telling him to go outside. He was asking him to open his eyes, to see that he was sitting there, surrounded by family, and that everyone was waiting for him to play. It was his turn.

Caden looked at his dominos and played a tile. Then, he went back to his game on his iPad. After all, he had to wait for his next turn (This story is taken from the devotional *Man of God Strong to Serve* by David R. Schmitt. Fenton: CTA, 2013. Pg. 12).

I am sure many of us can relate to a story like that of Caden with his family. Like me, you may have played the part of Caden a time or two. Especially in an age of personal electronic devices, it can be so easy for us to escape reality in favor of a virtual reality. We can be spending time with friends and family but not really engaging them. We are there but our minds and our attention are somewhere else—a video game, a text message conversation with a friend across the country, checking our email, or the recent updates on Facebook. The difficulty with situations like these is not so much the device as it is *how* it is being used.

In the situation with Caden, he is so occupied with being somewhere else that he loses sight of where God has placed him in that moment. He loses sight of the people with whom God has given him. It leads him to view a situation like playing a board game with his family as merely the passing of time rather than engaging in conversation and truly spending quality time with those around him. And so he ends up waiting for his next turn by passing the time, doing something else, rather than *waiting by participating*.

In our Gospel reading Jesus takes us to a moment of waiting as he tells a parable. The parable is part of a private conversation that Jesus is having with his twelve disciples. Jesus is speaking to his disciples during the last week of his life. The week we call Holy Week. His conversation with them takes place on the Mount of Olives outside of the city of Jerusalem (Mt 24:3). In this parable he takes those disciples to the moment of waiting before the start of a marriage feast. He takes them to that moment in order to teach them something about the kingdom of heaven.

During this conversation Jesus directs the attention of his Twelve Disciples toward his Second Coming. Even as he was with them on the Mount of Olives he points to a time when he will not be with them. He

points to a time of waiting. He points to Days in which the disciples will be waiting for the return of Christ, the bridegroom, to come back for his bride, the Church.

Jesus takes his disciples to this moment of waiting before the return of Christ on the Last Day in order to tell his disciples *how* they are to wait. They are to wait for Christ as wise, sensible disciples. They are to wait in the same way a sensible guest would wait for the coming of a bride and groom at the commencement of a marriage feast. That is, they are to be aptly prepared to meet and celebrate with them. At the time of Jesus that meant having enough oil in your lamp and extra on hand so that, regardless the time that the bridegroom came to the Feast, the guests were prepared.

From our experience of waiting for the grand entrance of the newlyweds for a wedding reception, we know what it is like to prepare for the coming of the couple. It could take a long time for them to arrive. The time between the end of the wedding ceremony and the start of the reception could be as long as two hours! This is why hors d'oeuvres are served while the guests are waiting. You don't know when the couple will arrive. This is why you head straight to the reception hall from the location of the wedding ceremony. As a guest you want to be well prepared to celebrate with the newlyweds regardless the time of their arrival.

In telling the parable Jesus makes it clear that those who base their preparations on their prediction of when the bridegroom will come or on the assumption that they can make last minute adjustments in order to be ready, are being silly and foolish. The wise and sensible disciple is the one who is well prepared and so is ready to welcome the bridegroom at any hour. He or she waits while being well prepared. They do not rely on their own predictions or attempts at making last minute adjustments to be ready.

As those who are in Christ we are prepared for his coming. God has prepared us. He has forgiven us all of our sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Trusting boldly in the work of Christ on our behalf we are prepared for his coming as his baptized, believing people. It is even my job as your Pastor to make sure you are well prepared. It is my job to help keep you in Christ by serving you faithfully with the Word and the Sacraments until the moment of his coming or until the hour of your death.

What are the ways, though, that we wait as God's people merely by passing the time, missing opportunities to participate in God's work in this world where he has placed us? It is interesting that all ten of the women in the parable *became drowsy and slept while they were* waiting (Mt 25:5)! Even the wise and sensible, well prepared guests seemed to view the time of waiting as merely the passing of time rather than as an opportunity to participate with those around them, in the situation in which they were placed in that moment.

So how can we as the Church, the bride of Christ, wait for the return of our Christ, our bridegroom, while also continually participating in the work of the Gospel to bring in even more well prepared guests to take part in the eternal marriage feast of the Lamb in his kingdom?

One way we wait by participating is by continually participating in the banquet feast of the Lord's Supper that we have before us on Sunday mornings. Being present in the Divine Service to receive the blessed wedding gifts is an important way that we wait while participating. Another way is by volunteering your time and using a portion of your talents and treasures in good Christian stewardship to help your congregation's efforts of making well prepared disciples.

I encourage all of you to think of at least one other unique way that you can wait while participating in the mission of the Gospel where God has placed you in life. For as we wait in Christ, as the bride of Christ, we have the freedom and privilege to wait while participating. We do not merely see waiting as the passing of time but we see it as an opportunity to serve our neighbor in love. Our Lord did not wait for thirty years here on earth by passing the time. He participated in the work of his Father in joy. It is my prayer that for all of us who are baptized into this Christ, we ask God to help us to model the example of our Lord and wait while participating in joyful service in the work of the Gospel in the world. Amen.