

**WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?**  
**TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, PROPER 27**  
**NOVEMBER 12, 2017**  
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**COLLECT OF THE DAY**

O God of justice and love, you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, and awaken us to the needs of others, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**WISDOM 6:12–16**

Wisdom is bright and unfading. She readily appears to those who love her. She's found by those who keep seeking after her. She makes herself known even in advance to those who desire her with all their hearts. Someone who awakens before dawn to look for her will find her already sitting at the door. Taking wisdom to heart is the way to bring your thinking to maturity. The one who can't sleep at night because he's consumed with thinking about her will soon be free from worry.

She herself goes about looking for those who are worthy of her. She graciously makes herself known to them as they travel. She comes to them in each of the ideas that they think.

**PSALM 78:1–7**

Hear my teaching, O my people; incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

**I will open my mouth in a parable; I will declare the mysteries of ancient times.**

That which we have heard and known,

and what our forefathers have told us, we will not hide from their children.

**We will recount to generations to come the praiseworthy deeds and the power of the Lord, and the wonderful works he has done.**

He gave his decrees to Jacob and established a law for Israel, which he commanded them to teach their children;

**That the generations to come might know, and the children yet unborn; that they in their turn might tell it to their children;**

So that they might put their trust in God, and not forget the deeds of God, but keep his commandments.

**TITUS 2:11–15**

The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. It educates us so that we can live sensible, ethical, and godly lives right now by rejecting ungodly lives and the desires of this world. At the same time we wait for the blessed hope and the glorious appearance of our great God and savior Jesus Christ. He gave himself for us in order to rescue us from every kind of lawless behavior, and cleanse a special people for himself who are eager to do good actions.

Talk about these things. Encourage and correct with complete authority. Don't let anyone disrespect you.

**MATTHEW 25:1–13**

[Jesus said,] "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten young bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom. Now five of them were wise, and the other five were foolish. The foolish ones took their lamps but didn't bring oil for them. But the wise ones took their lamps and also brought containers of oil."

When the groom was late in coming, they all became drowsy and went to sleep. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Look, the groom! Come out to meet him.'

"Then all those bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps. But the foolish bridesmaids said to the wise ones, 'Give us some of your oil, because our lamps have gone out.'

"But the wise bridesmaids replied, 'No, because if we share with you, there won't be enough for our lamps and yours. We have a better idea. You go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were gone to buy oil, the groom came. Those who were ready went with him into the wedding. Then the door was shut.

"Later the other bridesmaids came and said, 'Lord, lord, open the door for us.'

"But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

"Therefore, keep alert, because you don't know the day or the hour."

Song of the Day: *The Church's One Foundation*

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I've got to say right away that I do not admire those so-called "wise" bridesmaids.

They were selfish and working out of an attitude of scarcity, showing no creativity whatsoever as to how to manage the problem of serving as human street lamps for the groom when he finally got there.

Jesus is not generally known for being stingy; in just a few verses, he teaches about good sheep who share food, water, clothing and time with those who need them, and the bad goats, who are so selfish they don't even SEE those folks.

Jesus also has told us not to worry about whether we'll have enough – enough food, clothing, homes, etc.

Obviously, this parable has a deeper message than oil management.

This is a parable about how we live life, the universe and everything.

It asks us to look at our lives to consider whether what we SAY is important is reflected in what we do, day in, day out.

What Jesus is saying about these young ladies

is that half of them were committed to living one kind of life, and half were committed to living another kind of life.

The kind of life we have committed to living is evidenced by looking at our choices, our actions.

These choices and actions all have a foundation, what's most important to us.

What we SAY is important really doesn't matter.

It's what we DO that points to what our foundation really is.

Paul Tillich, a famous theologian, says our god is whoever or whatever

we give our actual allegiance to; this is our foundation, our god, no matter what our words say.

We proclaim our foundation is Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

and this is to whom we give our allegiance, this is our foundation.

If our foundation is Jesus, we should be as much like him as we can.

We are taught in the letter to Titus that we are to live sensible, ethical, and GODLY lives by rejecting ungodly lives and the desires of this world.

As I said last week, this may look very foolish to the world.

Those who were in charge of the world executed Jesus because

he challenged their priorities, their judgement as to what was sensible, ethical and godly.

To be sensible, of sound mind, means to think ahead.

What are the consequences of our choices?

We were big on consequences when raising our kids.

When Sarah was about 10, we let her ride her bicycle to school. It was just over half a mile.

We had discussed with her the importance of wearing a helmet.

My sister nearly died in a bicycle accident when hit by a car.

If she hadn't had her helmet on, she wouldn't have NEARLY died.

We talked about how you can't leave your helmet off, get hit by a car, and then change your mind and decide to wear your helmet. Choices matter.

So, we asked Sarah what the consequences should be

if she chose to ride her bike without a helmet on.

She thought for a minute and decided, "The bike goes in the garage for 3 days." Fine.

One morning, off Sarah went to school, helmet on.

She had permission to go to her friend Andrea's house after school.

Andrea lived just a couple of blocks from Clinton Elementary.

Some time after school was out, I got a phone call from a neighbor, a good friend who knew our rules.

"I just thought you should know I was going by Andrea's house,

and saw Sarah and Andrea riding their bikes around. Sarah didn't have her helmet on."

When Sarah got home (with her helmet on), I met her in the driveway.

I asked her what the consequence of riding without her helmet was.

She stuck her little chin out and said, "But, I HAVE my helmet on!"

I said I hadn't asked that, but what the consequence was if she did not.

"The bike goes in the garage for 3 days," she said.

I said, "You did not have your helmet on at Andrea's.

I am not asking you whether this is true; we both know it is. What should happen now?"

She looked at me, at first defiantly; I could see her trying to decide whether to lie to me.

I think she was learning, you can lie to mom, but not to yourself.

As the Collect for Purity says, "unto you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid." God knows our secrets. So do we.

She knew the truth. She took her helmet off, rolled the bike in the garage, locked it, and handed me the key, a single tear rolling down her cheek.

I didn't play "gotcha" with her, she knew the deal from the beginning.

She had been foolish; she was learning wisdom.

Being sensible means developing our internal abilities, thinking ahead.

Our choices matter, there are consequences – sometimes for a long time.

What does being ethical mean?

Ethics are the challenge of being wise regarding those around us.

The Greek word means to be just, to be a person of integrity.

That means to have what you SAY is important be what you also DO.

We face this question of ethics daily, not just as individuals, but as groups, even churches.

In yesterday's paper there was an article about what various congregations were going to do in response to the shooting at the church in Texas last week.

Now, I'm the first to say that being prepared is important, it's part of being sensible about consequences.

As any veteran will tell you, the military teaches you to how to use your weapons in basic training, because the middle of battle is too late to learn it.

But I have also heard veterans of war, including my father,

say that fighting, shooting and battling to the death

should be one of the last choices, not one of the first ones.

Only those who have not seen a real war think of it as a game.

Know how to shoot, but try to fix the relationship first.

What are the ethics of this parish? How shall we relate to our community?

Our signs SAY, "Come as you are, all are welcome." What shall we DO?

I have said many times over the years, "You are safe here. No one wants to hurt you."

I have meant this primarily as an assurance that here in this place no one will ridicule you, no one will judge you, no one will reject you. You can bring your authentic self here.

Whatever you wear, shorts or a top hat, whatever your doubts, your questions, maybe you're not even sure WHY you're here,

and maybe you are bursting with exuberant faith, however you come to us,

we will do our best to welcome you just as you are and make you feel safe.

Today, I state it as a hope and a trust in the physical realm, playing some pretty good odds.

There are some 500,000 church buildings in these United States.

One of them had a mass murder last week. I can't guarantee you

that no one will barge in with a gun, but a 1 in 500,000 chance is a very low one.

(not as low as winning the lottery, which has been called

a tax on people with poor math skills), but low enough.

Certainly low enough for me to keep saying, with some confidence,

"No one here wants to hurt you."

As a matter of parish security, your Vestry will consider our options,  
carefully and thoughtfully – it's an excellent group you can trust.

As your pastor, I will continue to focus on the matters of discipleship,  
of encouraging us all toward the wisdom, of having lives that integrate our words,  
especially what we say we believe on Sunday,

and what we do the other six and a half days of the week.

What do our calendar and our checkbook say about our priorities?

How do we talk TO our family? Do we treat them as well as we do the cashier at Publix?

The way some family members talk to each other is distressing.

How do we talk ABOUT each other?

Do we gossip and second guess? Or do we encourage and build each other up?

What do we watch on TV? What do we put in our heads?

Do we stuff our eyes and ears with evil and violence? or with goodness and godliness?

What kind of time do we make daily for prayer, study and worship?

You need to make time, but you also need to find something that really works for you.

I used to slavishly keep an extensive journal, recording details of my previous day.

It was tedious and even I got bored, even though it was my life!

Years ago I was at a clergy conference, and a priest named Jim  
mentioned how every morning he wrote a love letter to Jesus.

My head exploded! This was brilliant!

Jesus already knew EVERYTHING that had happened.

I didn't need to explain it all. I started doing it right away,  
and I've missed very few days since.

A few years later, I was at another clergy conference; Jim was there, too.

In the group, I thanked him for the idea of the love letter to Jesus.

He looked like he'd been hit with a wet codfish.

Evidently, he'd been through a very tough time, had lost his church,  
and was close to despair. He'd forgotten about his discipline,  
about MAKING time to tend to his relationship with Christ.

A friend said that my thanks had done for him what he had once done for me.

I'm not saying all of you need to do what I do, but I am saying

you all need to find what works, and MAKE time to pray, study and worship,  
or your relationship with God will suffer.

Back to our ethics of how we treat other people:

How do we care for the last, the least, the lost and the lonely?

We heard of a great number of ways just today: Bagzilla,  
the Community Thanksgiving Service, helping migrant workers,  
the Grace House Christmas Dinner, and there's also helping in not one but two  
Thrift Stores, which are big sources of our parish outreach money.

Finally, how do we care for our selves, our souls and bodies? This, too, is relational.

We may think what we do with our bodies is our business.

But, abusing ourselves is not a victimless crime. Are our bodies temples of the Holy Spirit,  
and our health and wellbeing affect those who love us. How many of us are worried  
because someone we love doesn't take care of themselves?

These are the threads of our lives we integrate into our ethics,

developing wise ways to relate to the lives of our God and other people.

Finally, the letter to Titus says we are to live godly lives.

Godly lives are those that walk in eternal life, the life of the Eternal One,  
right here and right now; to have everything we think, say and do  
serve the One we call Lord, taking his Reign very seriously in THIS life.

As the reading from Wisdom observes, figuring out a godly life is a full time job, one that lasts from when we get up at dawn and continues until sunset glows, and on into the night.

The payoff, though, is fantastic – did you notice the promise?

This godly life of wisdom will free us from worry.

This is a recurring theme in the life lived wisely, isn't it?

Jesus tells us not to worry, Paul tells us not to be anxious.

Again, be forewarned, being sensible, ethical, and godly, being like Jesus, ain't for sissies.

So often what Jesus teaches as being wise, the world sees as foolish.

What will we choose? What will be the consequences for our own life now?  
for the future of the earth?

for our children's children's children?

for that moment when we give an account to God of our choices?

In this place, my prayers is that we learn to choose to be people of the Way, the Way of Jesus, of discipleship, of wisdom.

The good news is that it's never too late to seek wisdom.

No matter how long we've been thrashing about in the dark with empty lamps and feeling left out in the cold, today is a new day.

As Anne of Green Gables said, today is a new day with no mistakes in it yet.

We can begin to seek wisdom right here and right now.

As Becky Robbins-Penniman says, however,  
the day I will make no mistakes is the day after I die.

We learn as we go. Some days we'll ride our bikes without a helmet.

Sometimes we'll forget to pray, we'll say a harsh word, we'll eat the French fries.

This is not cause for despair, but for repentance, renewal, and then resurrection,  
giving great thanks that our God is the God of second chances,  
and third and fourth and 10,000<sup>th</sup>.

Count on this: a life whose foundation is Jesus Christ is a life that shines  
with the justice, mercy, peace, forgiveness, joy, hope and love of the Reign of God.

Jesus gave everything he had to give this life to us.

What are we waiting for?