

Do Your Best To Be Ready
From the Bible: Matthew 25: 1-13

Paul Alcorn
Bedford Presbyterian Church
Bedford, New York
December 6, 2015

So, here we are...December 6th.

The first Sunday in December and the Second Sunday in Advent.

Which means two Sundays down and two to go as we make our way towards Christmas. In a more secular sense, if you are counting, December 6th also means, only 18 shopping days left until Christmas. All of which prompts this question:

As we move through these days towards Christmas, how ready are you?

So, as you consider your own life...

What you are doing and how you are spending the time and energy you have to spend, and how ready you are or think you should be, consider also the Gospel and what it has to say to us about being ready for Christmas when Christmas comes.

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

The Gospel setting for this story is not about Christmas, but the message is.

Change the words *drowsy* and *slept* to *overwhelmed* and *distracted* and the story hits a bit closer to home.

Which makes me wonder, what if this were true.

What if all we love about Christmas...all that requires our time and energy and demands our attention...actually distracts us from the real meaning of Christmas? What if our expectations for how Christmas should be keeps us from seeing what Christmas is or might be or needs to be? What if all our decorations and cards and holiday parties are merely diversions? Requiring our attention and filling our calendars, but leaving little time and energy for that *something more*? That *something else*.

What if the carols we love to listen to and to sing serve to blunt the provocative witness and unsettling meaning and message of the birth of Jesus? What if the candles we light and the creches we display deflect our attention from the harsh reality of a young family displaced and forced from home and expecting a baby?

Don't get me wrong.

I love Advent and I love getting ready for Christmas.

I love the carols and the creches and the fact that people take a bit more time with and for each other. I love the cards and notes we send and receive. I love that, for a moment, we pay more attention to those who have less. We buy boots for the homeless and gifts for families whose income is limited. We will give a gift card to the homeless men and women who will be sleeping here in our church on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. I love the sanctuary decorated and the candlelight and Silent Night. I don't even mind the music in the malls.

But, I also know...

Or at least my faith prompts me to believe that there is *something more* about these days.

Something deeper.

Something more important which begs for our attention.

And, God only knows, the world needs Christmas to be *something more*.

Something more than glitter and candles and carefully wrapped gifts.

The challenge for you and me, as people of faith, is how do we get ready for THAT?

Here is the challenge, I think.

What does it mean to say *God with us* in the face of the tragedy in San Bernardino and all those other places where anger and violence destroys lives and communities? And, what does it mean to sing about *Peace on Earth* as we remember the terrorist attack in Paris and the chaos in Syria and the desperate flight of hundreds of thousands refugees?

Today, at least, I am better at asking the questions than providing an answer.

Because I know if I attempted any answer right now it would sound empty.

And today, platitudes do more harm than good.

But, I think...

I hope...

I believe these are the right questions for us to ask.

What I think I know is this.

With the world as it is, in the midst of everything else you and I do to get ready for Christmas, we also need to plunge in deeply and to carve out time to live with and to think about and to pray about what *God with us* and *Peace on Earth* really ask of us. Asks of each of us. So we can be ready not for the kind of Christmas we want, but for the kind of Christmas the world needs.

And, then the Gospel leads us to this...

What if, in fact, Christmas is about more than just a day.

What if you and I, here in this place as a part of a gathered community of faith, began to think of Christmas as more of an attitude or a value or a way of life? What if *God with us* became our mantra and our prayer each day? What if *Peace on Earth* became the goal we work towards in some way each and every day? I found myself wondering this week, as I thought about this story from the Bible, that maybe fixating on a date...focusing so much on December 25...actually causes us to miss Christmas when Christmas comes.

If Christmas is, in fact, more than a day then maybe Christmas will come a hundred times between now and December 25. And, a thousand times in the days following December 25. Maybe *God with us* will be visible when we pass a stranger on the street or when we hear from an old friend or when we intentionally reach out and touch another's life. Maybe *Peace on Earth* comes a bit closer when we refuse to allow our anger to turn into hate and instead turns it into

courage. Or, when we find the resolve to speak up when others are demeaning or belittling another. Or, when collectively we find a way to say, "Enough is enough" and then actually do something about it.

Is it possible...

That any of those moments...

That all of those moments...

Might be Christmas?

And if they are...

When they are...

Will you be ready?

With both lamp and extra oil in hand

To run towards Christmas when and wherever Christmas appears.