“Important, Sure. But How Important?"

Text Matthew 25:1-13

Sunday, Nov 8, 2026

First Presbyterian Church, Franklin

“The kingdom of heaven is like a wedding feast that a king threw for his son.” That's the premise of Jesus' parable back in Matthew 22. And you may remember, that story gets very serious very fast. It’s a story of people not prepared even to listen to an invitation to an important event, even when the only requirement is to show up and celebrate. It was all free, but the invited could not be bothered. They missed the importance of what was laid right in front of them. They threw the invitation in the trash–or worse.

And now here we are again with another wedding-based parable. This time, obviously it is not about the king or the guests but about the wedding party itself—namely, the bridesmaids.

So, to be clear, I have been struggling a little to find myself in this story. And more importantly, to recognize just how important this parable is to the structure of Matthew's Gospel. He places this parable just after Jesus' teachings about the end of the world and just before his teachings about the Last Judgment. And if I lose you in this sermon, that is the main point—Jesus says there is a lot that may happen, and a lot of time may pass, but stay clear and awake to what really matters—because it does. It is IMPORTANT.

There is a crucial message here for those willing to hear.

Now maybe after Jesus’ breathtaking words in Matthew 24 about the utter destruction of the temple and horrific extinction of the city of Jerusalem as “only” (yikes!) a preview of the end of all human world history, maybe just maybe, people breathed a sigh of relief when he follows it with a seemingly safe topic—a wedding.

Now Matthew 22 would be a cautionary reminder, but who doesn’t love a wedding story?

Weddings—all weddings—are a big deal. As you might guess, I have presided at a lot of weddings and met with a lot of couples beforehand.

And in most cases, there is a tremendous amount of anxiety and stress that everything be perfect. EVERYTHING. PERFECT!

The anxiety usually runs through the families, and so every detail is a stress point. Every detail is checked and re-checked because something important is happening, and no one wants anything to go wrong.

Now the fact is that something usually does go wrong, whether among the wedding party or the guests or the decorations or the candles or…yes, just a lot of things. And like most ministers, I have a lot of stories about weddings and what can or did go wrong.

But precisely because weddings are so important, so vulnerable and so personal, I am not going to mention those. It is just too sensitive. What I can tell you is that even when things did go wrong, the wedding still happened — in one case but one.

And I can assure you that was in no way funny — at all.

In fact, as most if not all of you know, one of the biggest worries for any wedding is whether someone or some ones will reliably show up — first of all both the people getting married, but usually more nervously whether the caterer or musicians or bridesmaids or groomsmen will show up dressed and on time. It's sadly not a guarantee.

Now weddings are community and social events. There used to be write-ups about weddings in the newspaper, with meticulous details. Maybe it was details as if the writer were writing a review of the wedding. The whole family's reputation seemingly used to be based on just how beautiful the wedding was.

So imagine the headline "Wedding Marred by Absence of Half of the Bridesmaids!" "Bridesmaids Are No Show at Local Wedding." Yikes!

It would be a social scandal then and now. Almost unforgivable as well as unforgettable? At the very least it would tell the couple just how real their friendship and relationship is with the ones who could not really be bothered with the whole event. They showed up - yes - in this case, but was it in the secret hope that the appearance of showing up would be enough? Important? Sure.

But just how important they actually saw the event and the honor of being included was revealed by their acts to prepare and not the cut of their clothes.

I have never been at a wedding where members of the wedding party just trickled in during the actual service or just showed up in time for the reception. Thank God for that blessing.

And like Jesus' disciples listening to this parable, I don't think they could imagine such a grave display of disrespect, either.

"Showing up when it counts" really does matter, and waiting with people when it really does matter is a huge part of it. But simply putting in an appearance? That's something else entirely.

A fair number of weddings I have been a part of have started late, but thankfully no one in the wedding party has ever held up the watch, thrown down their flowers and walked out to see why he's saying, "That's it, I'm out. This is taking too long."

But maybe a lot of people around Jesus did, more or less exactly that. Because this parable is obviously not about those first century weddings, it's a fictional story, a fictional wedding with fictional people.

But the point is not at all fictional—that is very clear from where Matthew puts this parable and from Jesus' point at the end. This parable is one of three teachings in this chapter about the Last Judgment and how to use the time between then and now.

The kingdom of God is the wedding. We have been invited and said we want to be included. Jesus obviously insists it is a huge event determining everything. We say it's important.

Somehow how we use our time is the sign of just how important it really is to us.

How we use our words, our money and our time are—according to Jesus—telling indicators of what really matters to us. What is really important to us.

We cannot do the important things on the cheap, whether with time or money. "Putting in" an appearance for social reasons of whatever kind will not do.

These five young women hoped to do the wedding on the cheap. For one thing, oil did and does cost money. Half of them spent the money. Half did not. It mattered.

But in Jesus' story here near the End, the "End of Time" itself, it is that part about "time" that reveals the most, even more than money.

The most startling thing about Jesus is not so much his miracles as it is the time he gives to people—all sorts of people.

But mostly they hoped to do this wedding on the cheap of how much time they were prepared to give it.

And that is clearly where the story lands on every listener.

The innate selfishness in us seeks to reserve our time as our own - to be in enough to be seen but no more in most cases. But when and how we spend our time reveals even more than when or how we spend our money.

"Get in and get out." I have said to myself and not just about grabbing lunch at a busy restaurant.

But how much time given to the people Jesus gave his time to…that is really quite a question.

But heads up, that is where the message is about to go. Take a look at the end of this chapter. It's about the time we spent looking out for those in trouble, just like Jesus. All kinds of trouble.

And, as with some of our bridesmaids today, we cannot take our time with our friends, even when there is a free meal involved, just how much will we give to strangers, to those in jail, to the hungry, the naked, the sick that we may or may not know?

Here is a plain fact. Mercy is the core of the Kingdom of God. God's mercy is from everlasting to everlasting, thanks be to God! And mercy is our daily calling, as well. It is not optional. It is the essence of what matters most and what the kingdom us all about as much as a wedding is about getting married.

"But go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy not sacrifice." (Matthew 9:13)

Matthew's Gospel is literally one teaching after another about mercy in all its dimensions. And the great question is whether mercy matters to us—God's to us and ours to others.

Who wants to hear about mercy? It is Jesus' question. God's mercy to you and me. All of us. God's mercy is sure. Our mercy to others? It's a matter of how important God's is to us.

James bluntly puts it this way, "Judgment will be without mercy to those who have shown no mercy." (James 2:13). And he thankfully adds, "Mercy triumphs over judgment." James has heard Jesus.

Mercy is the most basic oil to have in our lamps. The oil is free for all simply willing to take it.

You and I will know (as God will) how much God's mercy matters to us by how much mercy we show to others with our words, our money and our time.

This parable tells us to be ready. To be ready for the return of Jesus and the final judgment. That's what this chapter in Matthew is all about. And we have been included, given the oil, the time, the money and the message. The bridegroom is coming, the wedding feast of the Lamb is happening. Don't go to sleep on what matters. Don't grow weary in doing good.

God's mercy will transform everything. EVERYTHING. It is already happening. Our own lives have been transformed by it.

Thanks be to God, you and I are in the wedding party. What else do we need to know?

"Be ready," Jesus says. "You know neither the time or hour." It is always the right time to show mercy. Jesus and the world around us await. No matter the day or time, light the lamp of mercy. God will handle all the rest. God is in charge of the wedding and paying all the cost. Celebrate with God in the triumph of God's mercy over all that contradicts or opposes it. Good news! Mercy wins. Spread the word. Keep the oil of mercy flowing into all wounds and keep the lamps of hope lit and shining bright. Look, no matter how dark it gets, the Bridegroom is coming! Let us keep our hearts and minds awake!

Amen.