

Stop Hitting the Snooze Button

Matthew 25:1-12

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1. Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.
2. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.
3. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them;
4. but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.
5. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept.
6. But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him."
7. Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps.
8. The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil for our lamps are going out."
9. 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."
10. 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.
11. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us."
12. 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 Snooze Button. That marvelous invention that, when pushed, offers you an additional 5-10-15 minutes of glorious sleep while snuggled deep in your toasty warm bed. I find it especially wonderful when Bill gets up to go about his morning routine while I roll over, pull up the covers and adjust my pillow to the perfect setting of "Ahhhhhh!" for just 5 more minutes. And then 5 more and then 5 more and then on especially cold mornings, 5 more before forcing myself to get up and slowly move through my morning routine.

I know research has shown this is not an optimal practice and often yields a confused and foggy brain for the first few hours of the morning. I understand that getting up when the alarm goes off actually helps settle sleep patterns, ensure more consistent sleep and actually helps your body regulate temperature in the morning so the air outside the bed doesn't feel so punishingly cold¹. And I know that I sacrifice the time I could be preparing for the day before our youngest wakes up and our mornings shift into chaos. But that 5 more minutes snuggled into a warm bed is just too enticing. More often than I not, I choose the snooze button. And more often than not, I end up running behind all day long!

Today's Scripture falls in the middle of a sermon Jesus preaches to his disciples at the end of his earthly life. In his efforts to prepare them as best he can, Jesus uses this and the other surrounding parables to help the disciples get a picture of what the Kingdom of God will be like when Jesus returns. He is prepping the disciples for life after he is gone and hoping to equip them with the skills and knowledge they will need – not only for their own survival but also to teach and share with others.

He uses the backdrop of a wedding to make his point. In Jesus' time weddings were a huge celebration. Guests would assemble at the home of the bride to be entertained by her parents until the groom arrived. As he approached, the bridesmaids lit their torches and led all guests out to greet him and then parade to his home where his parents were waiting and the ceremony would take place followed by an elaborate and extended party with much food and drink would continue for several days.

But in today's Scripture, the groom is delayed in his arrival and the bridesmaids and guests must wait...and wait...and wait...and wait. When he finally arrives around midnight, the bridesmaids rush to refill their oil lamps. But only half of the bridesmaids thought to bring extra oil for their lamps. The other half – who had just as much time to prepare as the first, are caught scrambling to try to find oil. They ask their fellow bridesmaids to share but learn there is not enough to go around. They head off in a desperate attempt to find more oil and upon return, learn they have missed the procession and the party entirely.

It is a harsh sounding story and seems to run counter to what we often hear about being loving and welcoming especially when we encounter words from Jesus in the gospels. But to understand its meaning, we have to remember this parables' purpose: to help educate and prepare the disciples for the Kingdom of God.

He uses the overall concept of a big extended wedding banquet that all these guests, bridesmaids and the bridegroom are headed to symbolize the kingdom of Heaven (Kingdom of God). This ultimate reality of a world that reflects everything just as God intended must be much like a special celebration. And the bridegroom that is being watched for – is Jesus, who is promised to return to lead the parade in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The bridesmaids are the followers of Jesus – they are the disciples, they are you and they are me. Half of them represent those Christians who are “fired up about Jesus but lack the commitment to stick with it”.ⁱⁱ They have great intentions but somehow something always seems to come up and take priority over why they can't fulfill their commitment to God. The other half, those are Christians who keep on doing the will of God even when the kingdom is delayedⁱⁱⁱ. They talk the talk AND they walk the walk. They live their faith not only on Sunday mornings but every other day as well.

In this parable, Jesus reminds us the Kingdom of Heaven will come but we have no idea when. We have to be ready at any time which also means to be ready in case he is delayed. The wise bridesmaids model for us the importance of being ready by carrying an extra flask of oil with them. They were prepared for the possibility that the bridegroom may be delayed. Prepared with enough oil and ready to stay through the period of waiting...no matter how long it might be.

Now – I spend a lot of time waiting. I wait for child 1 at trumpet lessons. I wait at Doctor's office, dentist's office and therapists appointments. I wait to pick children up from school. I wait at the pharmacy for prescriptions to be ready. I wait for insurance companies to process claims. I wait for Doctors to return calls. I even wait at the vet. And sometimes I simply sit and take a short nap. But usually I read or answer emails or do some piece of work. I find ways to be productive in my waiting. And over time, I have learned the importance of being ready for these snippets of time so I can accomplish what I need to in them.

When we think of the concept of "being ready" or "being prepared", we often think of it in terms of gathering or stockpiling things. For example, right before a storm you "get ready" by purchasing batteries, non-perishable food, medicines and even firewood. You fill your bathtub with water, charge all your electronic devices, maybe even purchase a generator and make sure you have plenty of candles and matches. But the preparation needed to be ready for the Kingdom of Heaven comes from the study and reading of the Bible, it comes from prayer for others and worshipping together in a community of faith, it comes from serving with justice and peace and offering forgiveness. It is the very life of discipleship that Jesus calls us to every day. Thus when your faith in the return of God is challenged, you have the resources to sustain you. Aided by the Spirit, you have built up a life of disciplines and habits that instill hope and empower living as a citizen of the Kingdom. You have enough oil to make it through the waiting period.

The early church heard these words but expected Jesus to return fairly soon after his resurrection and ascension. They expected a few days and maybe even months but as the months sped by and turned into years, it was easy to lose hope. Jesus knew that it would only take a little bit of time for the disciples and the early church to feel the pull of "the other" that might challenge them to hold onto their faith in the middle of difficulty and waiting.

We have almost 2000 years of distance from that time. We have the benefit of the entire book of Scripture, of the history of the larger church and of this church. We have the witness of literally hundreds of thousands of people who have modeled faith for us and yet, this message of being ready is still so very relevant today.

Just turn on the news or open the paper. Maybe jump onto social media or even drive down the street. Engage in conversation with your neighbors or classmates at school. Because it feels like everywhere you turn there are things that lull us into hitting that snooze button, pulling the covers up over our heads and going back to sleep.

But here's why we shouldn't. God in God's infinite wisdom offers us glimpses into that Kingdom to help us. We are given glimpses into what a world of peace and justice and love and compassion might look like. How?

- We glimpse the kingdom of God in the stories of the first responders who walked into a horrific scene in a Texas church this week but who helped care for families and victims in the throes of fear and shock and grief. They provided a face of comfort and compassion and safety.
- We glimpse the kingdom of God in the loving care of a nurse who offers patience and compassion and care while tending to an ailing man struggling with pain and physically lashing out.
- We glimpse the kingdom of God in the child who stands up to his friends and says yes, it is okay for the autistic classmate to sit at their table and then makes sure he is included in the conversation.
- We glimpse the kingdom of God in the plate of food offered to someone at the YWCA or Hogue Memorial and the smile as it is received.
- We glimpse the kingdom of God in kind, loving words we speak to each other.
- We glimpse the kingdom of God in the
- We glimpse the kingdom of God in the acts of love and compassion and justice that happen all around us every day and most likely, you are participating in them and don't even know it.

Friends, we are called to wait expectantly and purposefully for the kingdom of God. We continue to live lives devoted to peace and justice and compassion in the manner Jesus taught. And we are called to wait – inspired by the glimpses of the kingdom that surround us - and wait to be called out to join that eternal banquet that is being prepared for us. For some of you, this is an easy passage to hear and for some of us, it is time to stop hitting that snooze alarm. Take inspiration from the glimpses of God that surround us. It is time to throw back the covers, put your feet on the floor, and go fill that lamp with oil.

ⁱ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/01/why-hitting-snooze-is-bad-for-health_n_5630707.html

ⁱⁱ Long, Tom; Matthew: Westminster Bible Commentary. Louisville, KY. P.280.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, pp280-281.