

“Your assumptions are your windows on the world.
Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won’t come in.”
- Alan Alda

Assumptions wreak havoc in Matthew’s parable. The setting is a Middle Eastern wedding. Remnants of that era’s customs long persisted in some Palestinian villages. The bridal party awaits the bridegroom at the home of the bride's parents. It is the responsibility of the bridesmaids to escort the bride outside to meet the groom when he comes. Then, there is a procession by the wedding party to the groom's parents' house, where the wedding ceremony takes place. Since this traditionally occurs at night, lamps or torches are part of the procession's ritual. It is the bridesmaids' responsibility to see that they are prepared to light the bride's way.

Jesus' takes this familiar scene to illustrate one call of God’s sovereign realm upon us: readiness to serve. In the parable, five bridesmaids are deemed foolish. Why? They *assumed* the groom's coming would not be delayed, so took no extra lamp oil. The other five are deemed wise because they brought extra oil. They would be ready: if the groom came on time, if he came early, or if he came late. Their preparations assured they would be able to fulfill their responsibility of lighting the bride's way. Through the parable, Jesus reveals that God's coming realm requires actions, not just attitudes, that demonstrate readiness and wakefulness to the present moment.

What assumptions among us might rank as foolish? One of the most detrimental that persons and institutions of faith can make is to assume the ongoing existence of any faith institution. The illogic runs something like this. As long as we've been here, so has this church. We have no experience of this church not being here, so we cannot conceive of its not being here. Therefore, no matter what we do or don't do, the church will continue here. Right? Wrong.

But if that is the foolish assumption to avoid, what would be wise preparations? The parable urges wakefulness and readiness. Being awake to the changing settings and needs for responsible ministry. Being ready to take on such new roles and opportunities as they come. Or, as the old spiritual urges: *give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning, keep me burning till the break of day.*

For Reflection and Action:

What prevalent assumptions do you see as unhelpful for individuals or communities?

What preparations for faithful living do you find most helpful; most difficult?

Where do you see experience assumptions that undermine the church?

How does/might the parable’s “wakefulness/readiness” unfold at OSLC?