24th Sunday after Pentecost (A) November 8, 2026
Trinity Wethersfield

This morning I have good news, and I have bad news. It may be my first sermon here at Trinity for a regular Sunday worship service, but I'm a bad news first kind of person, so let's start there. The bad news is this: I think we missed Jesus' second coming.

Now, before you get too worried, by this I don't mean that we have missed a major, earth-shattering apocalypse. I don't mean that we have been left behind to fend for ourselves in the midst of trials and suffering (not that that's a particularly scriptural view of the end times anyway).

What I mean is simply this: in our baptismal covenant, which you all just renewed here at Trinity last week on All Saints Sunday, we commit to seek and serve Christ in all persons. We believe, in fact, that Christ is present in our neighbor. Jesus tells us as much as the end of this chapter we are reading today from Matthew – "whatever way you have served those in need, so you have served me," Jesus says. I suspect most of us are more or less on board with that idea.

But when we hear Jesus' parable today, I think we get a little nervous about how it ends. There are ten young women awaiting the coming of the bridegroom. They have lamps to light the way and oil to fill the lamps. But the bridegroom is delayed. All ten fall asleep. When the groom's imminent arrival is announce, five realize they are out of oil, running off to get more and missing the important moment. They miss the coming of the bridegroom. When they return, presumably having had to search some length of time for oil in the middle of the night, the door is shut. The bridegroom claims not to know them. And they are left out of the party.

We worship a God of grace and second chances and third chances and seventy-times-seven chances. So when Jesus speaks of exclusion, of shutting doors, of disavowing anyone, we understandably get a bit nervous. I don't know about you, but every time I read this parable, that shut door feels unfair – it was the bridegroom who was late, after all. It's the bridegroom's fault that the *reasonably* prepared – foolish - 5 ran out of oil and had no light. The other 5 who were over-prepared – "wise" – do not share. And it feels far too final – I know I want to be inside and not outside when it closes.

But let's remember that this is a parable, and parables are notoriously slippery to grasp ahold of. They are not strict allegory where each element of the story has an exact parallel. What I hear in this parable about people waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom, is a sense of urgency to being awake and prepared and focused on the most important element, and the reality that we do sometimes miss out on opportunities.

Sometimes there are second and third chances, and with God there is always grace to start again and the promise of resurrection to new life when the chances in this life run out. But believing in Jesus, believing that Christ shows up embodied in all the people we meet, that means that when people in need show up, there is an urgency to our response. And sometimes, we have individually and collectively missed Jesus in our neighbor.

I think about the challenge of our national history. We cannot undo the genocide of indigenous nations, centuries of slavery, and centuries more of injustice. Those doors are closed. We collectively failed to end those before they began. We have new opportunities to work for justice and equity in our own time, but we live with the failure and consequences of failing to see Jesus in one another in those times.

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There are times the church has failed our own people – we have not safeguarded our communities, welcomed people with open arms, allowed judgment to outshine mercy. We have clung too tightly to things that excluded others. And some of those doors have closed as a result.

There are times we have bypassed those in need or pushed them to the side. Times we have asked people to wait for justice. Times we have broken a relationship in a way that cannot be prepared. Sometimes the door is closed.

The early Christians lived with an incredible sense of urgency, believing Christ would be back in their lifetimes for the big second coming – the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting. They were in many ways alert and alive. As decades went by, they had to come to new understandings about the timing of Jesus' return. No one can live with that level of expectation every single hour. All the bridesmaids fell asleep, after all.

And yet, recognizing that we have opportunities all the time of Jesus entering out lives, how can we tap into that urgency? I think it's hard when in so many ways we live with a certain level of comfort. How can we respond to the readiness to which Jesus calls us in this parable, when we are so used to just having another chance?

There is real, urgent need before us. There is deep grief and pain right here in our community. There is hunger in our neighborhoods. There is violence in our own towns. There is violence in the world on a scale that is hard for us to comprehend. Christ is here in our neighbor now, today. And while we cannot solve all the world's problems, or even come close to solving all the problems of Wethersfield, Jesus calls us to the work that is before us, the readiness that only we can bring to the moments that Christ shows up in our lives.

As a church community you do this. I have witnessed just in the short time I have known you, the ways you show up for each other. You are there to support and care when someone is hurting or grieving or in need. You have found ways to support with your resources of money and space and time the needs of this wider community.

We live in a time of growing inequity of resources and access and power. We have ample opportunities to do work together to address the challenges that keep people suffering and in need. Some of that feels too distant or too large to do something about and so we let the urgency die away until Jesus nudges us again, until Jesus comes again and wakes us from slumber to scramble to light the way forward.

We won't do it perfectly. Just this week as I was mulling over this gospel text and this sermon was taking shape in my mind, I found myself in a situation – and this wasn't in the context of ministry – where I was tempted to distance myself from someone. It was a small thing in the bigger scheme of the world, but when faced with having to adjust and listen and be open to the image of God in another, I didn't want to. I heard that uncomfortable nudge from Jesus and…well…it's a work in progress. The door hasn't closed on that one just yet.

If that bad news is that we have missed Christ's coming on any number of occasions, the good news is that Christ is here again today. Christ is in our midst in this gathering as we bring our hurts and fears and needs to this place. Christ is here as we offer our gifts of time and talent and resources for the care of others. Christ is here offering himself to us in bread and wine again to feed us into the sense of urgency required to meet Christ's presence among us. So, come, let us awaken again to the coming of God into our

broken and hurting world as we rise to light the way forward for one another and celebrate God's transforming power arriving in our midst.