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A-27 Track 2
Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16
Psalm 70
Matthew 25:1-13

One Step Closer

As we come close to the end of the Church's liturgical year, the scriptures speak more and more of cosmic changes, dramatic endings, and unimaginable beginnings; in traditional language: judgment day and the coming of the Kingdom of God!

Depending upon your perspective, you may find these readings bracing, frightening, inspiring, quaint, or just plain nonsense. And looking at all the series and films about crime, punishment, and courtroom dramas, it would seem that our modern disdain for Doomsday is rather over the top. We roll our eyes over it when it comes from the Bible, but our eyes are glued to it when it appears on the screen. The drama of life, death, good and evil, still drives much of what we think and do. That is because we know all too well that the costs of life and death are anything BUT mythical. One thing we see more and more each day, is that there is no entirely safe place.

Now today's parable of the 10 virgins, maidens, bridesmaids, or as the Greek literally says: *the 10 teenage girls* – however you translate it – can teach us something about preparing for the uncertainties of life. While the part of the brain that handles good judgement does not fully develop until adulthood (and some might say it never stops developing), all the teenagers in this story WERE actually READY for the bridegroom's coming. But half of them were NOT ready FOR HIS DELAY.

Matthew was trying to teach his community something about watching and waiting for the DELAY of the Day of the Lord. As the first century entered its last decades, early Christians were becoming increasingly discouraged that Christ had not yet returned as he said he would. This was NOT just an academic question for them; it had real-life consequences. It is one thing to live the Beatitudes, to forgive your enemies, to give without expecting anything in return, all in expectant joy at the imminent return of Jesus. It is entirely another thing if Jesus wants us to do these things permanently, into all the years and ages to come!

So the issue is not so much are we prepared for the end of time, as it is what are we DOING with the TIME WE HAVE NOW? Do we watch and wait, support and celebrate grace and justice whenever we see them? Do we sustain ourselves with prayer, the sacraments and life-giving service each day? Are acts of loving-kindness only for special occasions (like when we think Jesus is watching!), or are they our daily behavior? Maybe if we did more of these things, we would meet Wisdom more often in our daily lives, as our first reading says.

And so, trimming the lamp of our own soul with the oil of the Spirit each and every day IS a pressing priority. Yet somehow prayer, service and kindness can be the first things that suffer in our busy schedules – and that makes us NO DIFFERENT than Matthew's first century community. Whether the apocalypse, the parousia, or Judgment Day is tomorrow, it is always true that "Time wastes too fast…" as Mrs. Jefferson said on her deathbed. We really can burn down the light of our own soul with impatience, grievance, apathy or self-medication, trying to deal with delayed peace, health, or security. DELAY **is** what we experience the most in life! But the question is, what

do we do while waiting? Is it just time wasted? Or might grace shine through the cracks of our frustration? As bad as the pain of violence or the agony of sickness are, it is the aching delay of peace or healing that makes the pain of the moment even worse.

Yes, Jesus is coming back – SO LOOK BUSY! But as Matthew reminds us: we know neither the day nor the hour. So what! It doesn't change a thing. It doesn't change a thing because the work God has given us to do, and the joy we were created for, are as close as our fingertips, heartbeat, or next breath. We only have to reach for, or take one step toward, grace or justice and the light of our lamp will burn brighter and LONGER – not matter WHAT the delay. In this life, we never get to see the whole picture, but the theologian Thomas Merton reminds us: *Real hope is NOT in something <u>we</u> think we can do, <u>but in God</u>, who is making something good out of it in some way we cannot see.*

So this week, as you go about your everyday tasks, try to, take just one step toward grace! Pray with today's Psalmist: *Come to me quickly, O God, my helper and deliverer, do not tarry.*

Come, Lord Jesus!