

In the parable, the bridesmaids have to wait so long for the groom's arrival, they became drowsy and slept. Five bridesmaids in their wisdom carry extra oil in their lamps. They consider and take seriously the possibility of surprise, of delay, of hardship, of unpredictability. They remain open and adaptable to the circumstances they find themselves in. Do we? Do we have the flexibility to handle the unexpected? Or are we clinging to rigid, narrow notions of what God's presence looks like, such that we miss God when God actually shows up?

Can we bear an unpredictable bridegroom? An unpredictable God?
A bridegroom who surprises us? A God who surprises us?

I don't like the fact that the five "foolish" bridesmaids in the parable arrive too late to gain entrance to the wedding. I don't like the fact that the groom closes his doors. I don't like the fact that the story leaves five women out in the cold. However, whether I like these things or not, they happen. Windows close. Chances fade. Time runs out. We know this; we experience it. The opportunity to mend the friendship, forgive the debt, break the habit, write the check, heal the wound, confront the injustice, embrace the church, release the bitterness - closes down. The opportunity ends.

This parable is telling us to be alert now, awake now, active now. Do what is holy and necessary now. The fatal mistake the five "foolish" bridesmaids make is that they leave. They assume that their oil supply is more important to the groom than their presence at his party.

I totally get the "foolish" bridesmaids in this narrative moment. I get how hard it is to stick around when my "light" is fading, and my reserves are low. I get what it's like to scramble for perfection, to insist on having my ducks in a row before I show up in front of God, or the church, or the world. After all, it's scary and vulnerable-making to linger in the dark when my pitiful little lamp is flickering, my once-robust faith is evaporating, and my lamp is filled with nothing but doubt and pain and grief and weariness.

Only a bridesmaid who trusts in the groom's deep and unconditional compassion, only a bridesmaid who knows that the groom has light and oil to spare, only a bridesmaid who understands that her presence - messy and imperfect though it might be - is of intrinsic value to the groom, will find the honesty and the courage to remain.

The bridesmaids in the parable lack this comprehension and courage. Five of them scatter, and the wedding procession suffers as a result. The loss is communal, extensive, and real. This is not a situation to celebrate or endorse; it's a situation to grieve.

Perhaps the lesson of this parable is: don't allow your fear or your sense of inadequacy keep you away from the celebration. Be willing to show up as you are - complicated, dishevelled, half-lit and half-baked. The groom delights in you - not in your lamp.

Remember, God created light. God *is* light. And Jesus is the light of the world.

Your half-empty lamp of oil, of you, isn't the point. *You* are.

And those "wise" bridesmaids? They distrust the sufficiency, generosity, and love of the bridegroom as much as the "foolish" bridesmaids do. Operating on the basis of scarcity and

fear, they refuse to share their oil. Smug in their own preparedness and “wisdom,” they forget all about mercy, empathy, kinship, and hospitality. They forget that the point of a wedding celebration is *celebration*. Gathering. Communing. Joining. Sharing. It doesn’t occur to them that their stinginess has consequences.

I’m not sure what it will take for us Christians to live fully into the abundance of God. We’re so afraid of emptiness, we worship excess. We’re so worried about opening our doors too wide, we shut them tight. We’re so obsessed with our own rightness before God, we forget that “rightness” divorced from love is always wrong. We live in dread that there won’t be enough to spare. Enough grace. Enough freedom. Enough forgiveness. Enough mercy. We would rather shove people into the dark than give up the illusion of our own brightness.

One of the great tragedies of the Christian story across history is that we are better known for policing our borders than for welcoming our neighbours. We feel safer and more pious behind closed doors than we do with open arms. This parable is showing us the ugliness of the closed door. Closed doors of lives, and of the church.

Whatever our level wisdom or foolishness ensure our doors are open because the wedding is full of holy light.

Wendy