

Pentecost XXIII

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

“Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” In the name..

— more like exhausting —

I'd never thought of our culture as drowsy before—that is until I read this Scripture. On the one hand, I've always identified, to my unsurprised horror, with the sleepy disciples in the garden on the night in which our Lord was betrayed. All night vigils—especially those whose sole focus is prayer—are not where my spiritual gifts seem to shine brightest. I've always taken Jesus' rebuke of Peter, James, and John as a rebuke centered squarely upon me. And not because I have some abusive and mercenary sense of the law—in other words, I've never felt the sharpness of that scene because I felt that I needed to prove something to God about my abilities. It is, rather, on occasion of the sheer frailty of my humanity that I'm so embarrassed. I sort of think to myself, “Someone just hand me a prayer book and I'll just start at the beginning!” The Watch on Maundy Thursday is hard!

Not altogether different than the bridesmaids in this morning's passage. It is the hasty and unprepared who miss the wedding, right? But time is not the culprit or enemy, here. A lack of wisdom is. The delay, it would seem, was so profound that even the wise bridesmaids were able to catch a few Z's; so it's not a rushed and malicious bridegroom who's at fault, here. Even when Lazarus died, you may remember, Jesus waited a few days before returning to the grave for resurrection, right? One of the most profoundly under-preached attributes of Jesus is his unhurried nature. Jesus has all of the time now and in eternity to be

Jesus. He does not have an Apple watch, but he has time. Jesus is profoundly patient and unhurried in bringing his Kingdom to bear. The heavenly perspective is unflappable. Eternal perspective is awake! It is lucid, animated, lively, wild, and glorious! But it is not worried about it. It has no anxiety. It is not compulsive. It is the most timely and perfected present-ness that leaves off the troubles yet-to-be-seen, and instead spills wisdom into the world with each moment. And the 5 wise bridesmaids seem profoundly aware of this. This eternal perspective, actually, makes me think of Orual in *Until We Have Faces*, by C.S. Lewis. Psyche, her sister, has already been taken by Cupid, though she thinks that the beast has simply eaten her. As she rides with the royal guard to the tree to which she had been chained, she turns to see a new world. All of the pain, the fear, the illness of her grief, the (now) tiny town that she had never seen from the perspective of the mountain, is now dwarfed by the beauty surround. She is even tempted to feel joy for a moment, embarrassed at the thought given her mission. It is, for the first time, that she has had any perspective whatsoever on her life in the palace.

And so my simple prayer is this: St. John's church has been, through thick and thin, patiently waiting for over 100 years. I have seen entries as large 250 in church; I have seen entries some Sunday's as small as 29. Christ was present at both. The eucharist was celebrated. The ministries were open for business. Coffee hour was animated with the voices of the faithful in Christ. The building was carefully tended in preparation for next Sunday's prayers. My prayer is this: that St. John's be numbered among the faithful bridesmaids who attentively and wisely await their Savior's return in unhurried love for their beloved and for one another.

The Whole Food's bag in my hand every so often has some rather ingenious sloganeering printed on the side: "Improving lives with every purchase." Which is precisely NOT the prayer of the faithful bridesmaid. Wisdom is not born of our transactions, no matter how much organic chap-stick I lather on my grass-finished lips. In fact, one of the great gifts of the church is its avoidance of any transactional charity. The church, instead, is wise in love. Her charity is not for sale, and her wicks and oil are provided by her very master. Do not let the haste of indifference prove your inelligibility, when everthing that is required is already given.

At this altar, the bridegrooms comes. Our only haste is in receiving his good gifts.