

Proper 26, Year A
Matthew 25: 1-13
November 9, 2008

Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, California

Foolish or Wise?
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

I must admit, I come at this parable from a particular vantage point. In the spirit of full disclosure, I need to tell you that I do not keep my gas tank half full. Nor do I have three days worth of water or a week's worth of food set aside in case of an earthquake. I have not prepared a list of my credit cards in case my wallet is stolen. Tim and I have no emergency notification procedure. Should disaster strike, we would be unprepared—at least according to the latest disaster preparedness standards. To put it in Biblical language, we don't even have an extra flask of oil in our pocket.

You can imagine, I have an affinity for those bridesmaids whose lamps were low. I find it hard to blame them. And I wonder about those other bridesmaids too. The ones who refused to share their oil. Where were they when their friends came knocking on the door?

Is this a story of preparedness or is it a story of something else? I cannot read or hear this story about the wise and foolish ones and not hear the words of Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. Remember what he says to the Church at Corinth, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." So I wonder, "What is foolish and what is wise and what is the measuring rod."

Is it foolish to trust in the kindness of others? Is it folly to believe that folks will share what they have with those in need?

Is it wisdom to hoard oil in the event of a long night? Are the wise ones those who fend for themselves and let others stand or fall on their own?

Is this the Gospel Jesus proclaims? Is this what the Reign of God looks like? I think not.

Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus points to another way of living in the world—a way of living based not on scarcity but abundance, not on hoarding but on sharing, not on suspicion but on trust, not on fear but on love. Jesus calls us to a world of reversals—reversals of prevailing wisdom.

No wonder we find it odd—that Reign of God. It runs counter to the wisdom of our day. Our culture screams at us, "Look out for number one." "The one who dies with the most toys wins." "More. More. More." "Don't turn your back." "It's not safe." Ours is a culture of fear—fear of not having enough, fear of being vulnerable, fear of not being loved.

And it is so easy to be swayed by our culture. To fall into the trap of fearfulness. To get caught up in the snare of consumerism. The messages are relentless. They pour at us day and night. Sometimes we're half way down the path before we even know what path it is.

But our faith calls us to live a different way—a way grounded in the sure knowledge of God's abundant love; a way of relying not on ourselves but on God; way marked by knowing that the kindness of others is really the kindness of God incarnate.

How do we stay on course living as we do in world often premised on scarcity and fear?

I think we do it through our stories.

Stories of God's abundant love at work in our lives: stories of unexpected kindness we've received or given; stories of strength that came to us when we were at our weakest; stories of surprise encounters with God's amazing grace. Surprising stories. Stories of our foolishness—the kind of foolishness God finds wise. It's those stories that keep us coming back to true.

Today, is our Commitment Sunday. The day when we make a commitment to support this part of the Body of Christ we call Trinity.

When you make your commitment, when you walk up the aisle and drop your Commitment Covenant in the plate upon the altar, it's important you know to what you are committing.

Let me make it clear—

We are a people who live not in fear of scarcity but in confidence of abundance.

We are a people who, like the early Christians, hold what we have in common.

None of us—let me say that again—none of us—holds exclusive ownership over any part of this community. Not the oldest. Not the youngest. None of us. All that we have and all that we are belongs to God.

We are a people who try our best to see one another as beloved children of God—that means we trust one another, we forgive one another, and we live, as best we can, each day and each moment in possibility and hope.

We are a people who live lives of connectedness—with God and one another.

A people ready to give witness to God's love through our stories and our lives.

Some might count us foolish but we know deep in our bones what the world counts foolish God counts wise.