

Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church

Pastor's Blog: November 3, 2011



By the Rev. Dr. James Carter

In the Tuesday noon Brown Bag Lunch group this week we were looking at the preacher's text for Sunday, November 6. The text is Matthew 25:1-13 which, I'm sure you will recall, is the parable of The Wise and Foolish Virgins, those waiting on the bridegroom to come fetch the bride in order to go on to his family home for the wedding. In order to do this after darkness falls they will need light and these bridesmaids, with their oil lamps, are to light the way.

I'll be saying more about the parable on Sunday in the sermon but here I want to comment on the challenge this lectionary text presents for a sermon on what happens to be the formal beginning of our Stewardship emphasis. The text is all about being prepared for the coming of the bridegroom. Will the maidens have enough oil to keep their lamps going if he should be delayed? That is one question. And another is what will happen to those who run out of oil and do not get to the celebration before the door to the bridegroom's house is locked?

This is one of several texts toward the end of Matthew's gospel that have to do with the coming again of Jesus, the Christ of God. They can be scary on first hearing but, later, as we become more familiar with their ideas and emphasis, we may find them motivating us to examine our life with God. That is to say, stories like this one are designed to get our attention so that we will ask the important question, "Am I prepared to review and defend my life before God?" If the answer is "Yes" it is likely because I'm spending time each day thinking and acting in ways that will please God. I will be living my life in response to what I believe are God's expectations of me. (Read the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 ff. for a beginner's checklist).



It would be a mistake to suggest that this is a text intended to scare us into right behavior or, on a Stewardship Sunday, to suggest that we should give generously to assure that we don't get zapped at the Last Judgment. Stewardship is not about giving in order to avoid some terrible judgment. Stewardship is about acting thankfully for all that God has done for us. As God has been generous with us so we, in turn, want to be generous with our resources. As the old hymn declares, "We give Thee but Thine own..." recognizing that acting responsibly is largely what "being prepared" to meet Jesus, the Christ is all about. We see a little more of Jesus each day as we act a little more as Jesus would have us act, day by day. We love because God first loved us. We give because God first gave to us in the person of Jesus Christ. We know what to do. Now is the time to act on what we know.