

Proper #27...Series A
Good Shepherd Episcopal Church (November 7&8-2020)

Text: Matthew 25:1-13
Title: **"PREPARATION!!"**

It is late in the evening...the family and friends of the bride and the groom have been celebrating and feasting at the Bride's home for the better part of the day...and now everyone waits in joyful anticipation for the arrival of the bridegroom...Finally, just before midnight, a messengers announces, with great fanfare and excitement, **"the Bridegroom has arrived"**. The groom, accompanied by his friends, is met by the bride, and the bridesmaids carrying torches, lead the bride and the groom and the entire wedding party in a joyous procession to the home of the bridegroom's father where the wedding ceremony is actually held....and the celebration...the feasting and singing and dancing ...continues into the wee hours of the morning!!

In today's Gospel, Jesus makes an astonishing and somewhat surprising announcement...He said that the coming...the arrival of the Kingdom of God will be like the arrival of the bridegroom at a traditional Palestinian wedding...you know that the groom is coming but you don't know exactly when he is coming!

The last time I preached on the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids (our Gospel reading for this 23rd Sunday after the Great Feast of Pentecost) was on Sunday, November 9th, 2014...the Sunday I officially begun my ministry as your Interim Rector following the retirement of Mth. Pat Powell. I wonder if anyone remembers the homily that I preached on that occasion? Good...because I am going to preach essentially the same homily this evening/morning!

Six years ago I told you that Jesus, when He told this parable for the first time (During Holy Week...after Palm Sunday and before Good Friday) was in a time of TRANSITION- his brief, 3 year public ministry was ending and his death and resurrection were just days ahead. And the people who read the Evangelist Matthew's version of the parable were also in transition: Jesus was no longer physically present...he had Ascended into heaven (40 days after Easter) and now they were waiting for him to return to establish His Kingdom of Justice/Peace and Love. And, as we learned just hours ago, we learned that we are a nation and a people in transition as one administration prepares to leave and another administration prepares to govern. And we who heard the parable this evening/morning (more than 2000 years later...we are, once again, a people in TRANSITION. And, my friends, this transition (like every transition that we experience in this life) began with an ending (Mth. Susan's retirement and departure at the end of September) and it will end with a new beginning (when the next Rector privileged to serve this wonderful congregation is called and installed).

And friends, it is at this point where Jesus' remarkable story intersects and connects with our Story; and where we find ourselves at this unique moment in our history. And I will tell you again what I told you 6 years ago: the essential task...the most important work of people in transition is **PREPARATION**...and the key to success in any enterprise...any endeavor (whether it is running a business, planning for retirement, maintaining a health marriage or preaching the Gospel of Grace) is consistent, focused and intentional PREPARATION. And my role as your interim rector will certainly be to be your pastor/priest/teacher/spiritual guide and friend and fellow pilgrim in the strenuous journey of Christian discipleship. But the most important thing...THE MOST IMPORTANT THING I will be privileged to do during our time together will be to work together with your Wardens and vestry and the lay leadership of the parish to prepare to welcome and receive the next rector who will serve this parish and this community. And the only accurate measure of my success will be the degree to which you are ready, when I leave, to receive the next "Permanent Shepherd" who will lead this Faith community into the future.

I close this homily (the way I closed my first homily back in 2014) by reminding you of three realities which will shape and focus my ministry during this time of TRANSITION::

#1. The agreement I made with the Wardens and Vestry (which was approved by Bishop Stokes) was to serve as your **TEMPORARY SHEPHERD**...that means that our time together will be brief (the average length of an interim ministry in the Diocese of NJ is between 12-15 months, but that was before the Pandemic changed everything), but I want you to know that Good Shepherd is my church home, and I will be with you for as long as it takes...I'm not going anywhere!

#2. The agreement I made with the Wardens and Vestry (which was approved by Bishop Stokes) was to serve as your **"PART-TIME"** Temporary Shepherd. As many of you know, I retired from fulltime parish ministry in January of 2019, and I just turned 70 in August... This means I must be disciplined and a good steward of the time I will spend with you each week, Before I accepted this invitation, I promised Susan that I will not allow my work at GSEC to evolve into a full time job! I will need your help to keep that promise!

#3. Finally, I will tell you what I told you back in 2014 and what I have told very congregation I have ever served in nearly 35 years of ordained ministry: sooner or later, something I say or do as I exercise this ministry will offend and hurt some people. I promise ...that will never be my intention but I know, from painful personal experience, that, sooner or later, it will happen. And when it happens I will need you to demonstrate the courage and the confidence to confront me...to come to me and say, *"Fr. Dave, when you said that or when you did that, it really hurt me"*. (because I will probably be totally unaware). Then I will have an opportunity to ask your forgiveness and together, we can repair the damage that's been done!

Thank you so much for the trust and the confidence you have placed in me in calling me, for a second time, to be your Interim Rector...your TEMPORARY SHEPHERD. I am absolutely convinced that the best and brightest days in the long and distinguished history of this parish are ahead and that, working together in a spirit of love, mutual respect and partnership, we will prepare for that promising future. We've got work to

do...important work to do together, so let's get busy, continuing to become the church and the people God created us, in the waters of our Baptism...
to be!! Amen!!