

## “Being Ready” Matthew 15:1-13 – Last Sunday 2023

Dear Friends, may grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and Christ Jesus our Lord.

“Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” (Matthew 25:13) Caribou Coffee is an American coffee chain that spans the whole US. They have a spot in nearly every major airport, and they compete directly with large brands like Starbucks and Tim Hortons. I saw them all the time in my US travels, especially in the NW United States.

For a coffee joint, they came up with a most fitting motto: “Life is short. Stay awake for it.” Caffeinated coffee is the favored pick-me-up for many of us. Whether we’re waking up in the morning or struggling through a post-lunch slump, coffee can get our gears moving again. Caribou’s saying captures the urgency of living fully. Let us relish and appreciate every single day we’re given.

However, there are ways we can sleep through life that no amount of caffeine can remedy. Jesus’ parable of the ten maidens is addressing this mental and spiritual sleepiness. How are we shuffling through our days on autopilot? How have we become numbed and sedated to the struggles and silent crises going on around us? Are we sleepwalking on our faith journey?

## “Being Ready” Matthew 15:1-13 – Last Sunday 2023

We hear today one of Jesus’ parables. It’s a kingdom parable. Something about this story describes an aspect of the Kingdom of Heaven. This parable highlights the importance of staying alert and prepared.

The parable centers on a wedding celebration. In first century Palestine, a wedding was a huge event. The festivities went on for a week. The groom made his way from his house to that of his bride where the ceremony would take place. The bridesmaids stood outside and kept watch for him. They were to meet him and join the procession to the wedding. However, the exact time of his arrival was unknown. As he came near, someone in the groom’s party hailed his arrival so people would know he was coming.

In Jesus’ parable, the bridesmaids have taken their posts to wait for the groom to arrive. Hour after hour passed, but still he hadn’t come. Finally, in the middle of the night, the shout was heard. The groom was on his way.

Some of the bridesmaids had come prepared for a later than anticipated arrival. They’d brought extra oil for their lamps. But other bridesmaids weren’t as foresightful. Their lamps had nearly run out of oil when the groom arrived. As he was approaching, they had to run off

## “Being Ready” Matthew 15:1-13 – Last Sunday 2023

to purchase more oil. They missed his arrival. By the time they returned, the door to the banquet had been shut.

The foolish maidens had not been prepared for extenuating circumstances. As the saying goes, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

Being prepared helps the student whose teacher plans an unexpected pop quiz. Surgeons and their teams go through extensive efforts to prepare for an operation. Expecting parents prepare their house for a newborn. Every month we hold fire drills in the various senior’s centers to prepare them on what to do if there should be a fire.

I enjoy watching TED talks during my lunch breaks. I had the opportunity to watch one where Robert O’Neill was the speaker. O’Neill had been part of the Seal Team 6 which raided the Bin Laden compound. He spoke about the extensive training that candidates for the Navy Seals go through. Not only is it physically and mentally grueling, it also formulates their thinking. They’re constantly learning to plan ahead. They want to be ready for any potential turn of events. They’re trained to keep a hawk-like awareness of all that goes on around them.

O’Neill related the thorough training the team went through to prepare for the raid on the Bin Laden compound. They went over and

## “Being Ready” Matthew 15:1-13 – Last Sunday 2023

over their plans and actions. They memorized the compound. They knew exactly where their helicopters would land, how far they would need to travel by foot. The team knew who would go first and who would follow. They prepared for potential complications, including what to do if they lost a helicopter.

It was very moving and motivational to listen to him. His message boiled down to the critical importance of preparation. Don't put off 'til tomorrow which you should do today. Jesus' parable of the maidens accentuates the importance of preparation and alertness. He bids us to keep awake and be ready.

But what does this look like in God's kingdom? Whenever I hear one of Jesus' kingdom parables, my antennae immediately point towards Martin Luther's explanation for the Lord's Prayer, specifically on "Thy kingdom come." He writes: "God's kingdom comes indeed without our praying for it, but we ask in this prayer that it may come also to us." God's kingdom is coming to us. At any given time, on any given day, God's kingdom is revealing itself to us. God's kingdom presents itself among the people and the circumstances of this world.

In the parable of the 10 maidens, Jesus is urging us to keep alert. Look for the God sightings around us, they're there! The bridegroom is

## “Being Ready” Matthew 15:1-13 – Last Sunday 2023

coming at any time. We keep awake and alert for opportunities of service.

We find ourselves now in a very unusual time. Our lives are changed because of COVID-19, wars, uncertainty, rising costs and so much more. Right now, we need more than ever to keep alert and prepared! But you know, with all the bad news we hear daily, we’ve become worn down. Ourselves and everyone around us feel exhaustion from this marathon. At first, we felt the rush of adrenaline as we changed our behaviors for COVID, and we held our breath during the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine, and we shed tears at the senseless loss of life in Palestine and Israel. But the initial kick of adrenaline can be sustained for only so long. And then we become worn and weary.

We’re at that stage now. Weary, and we know there’s still more to come. Goodness, we sound like those maidens who are running out of oil for their lamps!

How are we alert and prepared? Most of all, we need to be gentle with ourselves and with one another. The oil in our lamps can be a soothing balm. A little bit of grace and understanding will keep our gears lubricated! We need to keep alert to one another. Who is in need of a listening ear or a friendly phone call? Who could use some help under the challenge of virtual learning? Let us be gracious and gentle.

## “Being Ready” Matthew 15:1-13 – Last Sunday 2023

This time of stillness can also be an unanticipated opportunity to spend more time in prayer and meditation. Look to the lamp of God’s word.

That word is a source of strength and direction.

A pastor from the Kitchener circuit shared with me his story about his beloved Aunt Anna. Anna was legendary in her family. The pastor shared an incident when some missionaries came to Anna’s house. Anna was in her garden, hoeing weeds. When no one answered the door, the missionaries walked around to the back of the house. There they found Anna in her garden. They made their witness to her about their church and about Jesus. Finally, they asked Anna about her salvation. Anna looked up from her hoeing and at the young men. She said, “All you have to do is be ready. Are you ready?” Then she returned to her hoeing.

The Pastor continued, “Aunt Anna was buried with her hoe in her hand. She lived her life in a manner of being ready – ready to host, ready to share, ready to laugh, ready for God’s kingdom anytime it would make itself known.” Friends, God’s kingdom comes to us, even without our prayer! But let us pray and ask that it may come also among us. Keep alert! Be ready! God’s kingdom is at hand.