

November 8, 2020

This is a parable emphasizing watchfulness and urgency, looking for the kingdom of heaven. Those who were ready were let into the banquet hall, and others missed out.

The parable ends with Jesus instructing the disciples to “Keep awake...” In other words, have a plan, and stay alert. This is the urgency...

Today I'd like to do a little reflecting on watchfulness and urgency. As Lutherans we're all about being justified by grace through faith... Through our baptism, God has chosen us and makes promises to love and forgive us. We are not afraid of our lamps going out, because we are those lamps, burning bright...

So then, what becomes of watchfulness and urgency? Well, Jesus did come to save us from hell, and specifically the hell that *we* regularly make for ourselves, here on earth. We are Saints, but we're also sinners... We are infected with sin, and that causes us all sorts of conflicts and unhealthy living and destruction of relationships.

The watchfulness and urgency we live with is to confess our sin, seek God's forgiveness, and then seek the forgiveness of each other. As we engage worship every week, this is what we do. It's about knowing who we are and whose we are. It's about being the Body of Christ in this place at this time.

Quick story... I was doing a bible study many years ago with a group of older adults in an apartment complex, in their community room. We started to talk about television shows... One person liked hallmark movies. And I agree, there's usually something uplifting and affirming in those stories...

Another participant, who was new to the group said she liked to watch one particular slant of news, which she named. She suggested, "They were the only ones who told the truth." Then she went on to talk about the stupid people who watched the opposite brand of news. She was hyper-partisan...

As she talked, I watched the other participants; I knew a lot of them would disagree with her... But everyone pretty much let her have her say, and listened attentively, respectfully and politely.

Later in the bible study, she launched into a tirade about Catholics and how they refused to give communion to people from other denominations. And again, all the other participants listened respectfully and politely... For the rest of that bible study, she pretty much dominated and gave her opinions freely. I imagined a lot of the participants kinda felt trampled on...

The next month I went back and was pretty much expecting the same situation. But something different happened. When I used to do those bible studies, I usually started with checking-in with everyone. Just going around the circle and letting people talk about what's going on in their lives.

When it came to her turn, she confessed she had talked too much last time... Which I thought was amazing. She had some self-awareness that surprised me. That self-awareness was like she was being watchful... She was watchful of her own words, and in her urgency, she decided to own it and let the others know she wanted to be different.

And for that next hour, she was watchful of her words. Oh, don't get me wrong, she still had plenty to say... It was just that she knew she could dominate the conversation, and she was trying hard not to. Which I appreciated, and so did the other participants.

And over time, she actually became a trusted and valued member of that bible study... Being watchful and urgent is about paying attention to ourselves and to others, some self-awareness.

Now, we have to talk about this past week. We had our election and there were winners and losers. There are some people who are happy and some who are angry; some who want to celebrate, and some who want to grieve. And as the Body of Christ in this place and at this time, we are both. We are those who are happy, and those who are grieving.

Now, while the secular world out there wants everyone to divide and throw mud... We are fundamentally different. As the Body of Christ, we transcend, and we are watchful and urgent to discern the whole Body of Christ.

That means that when people are grieving, we are compassionate to them. We listen, we listen so hard we become vulnerable to change because of what we hear. We might not change our opinions, but we do change our hearts and build empathy. And that's the goal, that's why we do it...

Rather than celebrate victory, we console those who grieve. We are watchful for those who are grieving, and listen to their lost hopes. Discerning the whole Body of Christ is more important than winning or losing.

And this is something the church, the Body of Christ needs to model if the world is to heal of all this divisiveness. If we can't find ways to be compassionate to one another in our differences here, we certainly can't expect it out there... So, we need to build it here; for the sake of the world out there.

Watchfulness and urgency? Perhaps there is no more urgent time than in the present... What do you think? Now remember, we are those lamps, burning bright...

And let us always remember, they will know we are Christians by our love...

Amen...