

“Resourceful Imagination”

The Rev Drew Willard
UCC@The Villages, FL
November 21, 2010

Colossians 1:11-20

Matthew 25:1-13

[The Apostle Paul said,]

‘May you be made strong with all the strength
that comes from his glorious power,
and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience...’

Colossians 1:11

Let us pray... O God,

What has been imagined has come to pass –
our new church building has become a reality,
and now we have to pay for it.

So, strengthen us to your good purpose and
don’t let us let you down.

Amen

In recent years, a lot of attention has been given to the legends
of the Freemasons and the Knight Templars
regarding a great treasure.

There’s all kinds of speculation about what that treasure
actually could have been.

The book, The DaVinci Code popularized this story
as a quest for the Holy Grail, and

the movie “National Treasure” made it out to be
an immense collection of priceless historical objects.

Historians theorize that the Templars actually discovered something
at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem which gave them
remarkable financial influence in their time.

They even established a system of credit
which served as a prototype for modern banks.

They were also renowned for their techniques of masonry
which revolutionized the construction of churches and castles –
so, the treasure may simply have been
architectural plans and techniques.

However, their treasure was also their downfall
when the European emperor and the pope acted together
to denounce the Templars as heretics and seize their assets.

But the treasure itself was never found...

Willard, p.2

Imagine finding such a treasure –

it would be like winning the lottery;

And don't we like to think that would solve all our problems,

yet how often do we hear of people who do win the lottery –
and lose it almost as fast?

There are still treasures to be found –

perhaps even like the fabulous objects of the Templars,

but wouldn't the most important one be to discover
the wisdom for how to handle the resources of your life?

The traditional interpretation of our Gospel story today

about the 10 bridesmaids is that we should be like the wise ones,

and properly prepare ourselves for the day of the Lord

when the Son of Man, the true Heir of Humanity

will come to judge the world at the end of time.

The wise maidens are like other examples in Jesus' parables

of those who are prepared to receive God's grace

like the good soil that has been weeded and plowed up,

or the wedding guests properly attired in formal garments,

or those who successfully invested their talents.

Speaking of talents, I found an online resource by Steve Amato of

the Boston Chinese Bible Study Group [<http://www.bcbsr.com/intro.html>].

which included a "rap" version of this parable:

The kingdom is like ten virgins who went

And took their lamps to a wedding event

Five were foolish and five were wise

The wise took oil perhaps pint-size

The foolish took none they didn't prepare

For the groom took his time before he got there

They all became drowsy and fell asleep.

No sound was heard, no not a peep

Till midnight did come and someone cried out.

"Here's the bridegroom. You must come out!"

The virgins woke up only to find

The wise could see while the foolish were blind

Willard, p.3

For they used up the oil they needed to see
They had taken the journey much too carefree
They asked the wise to give them some
But the wise told them where they could buy some from
But while they journeyed to buy the oil
The groom arrived which wasted their toil

For the wise went in and the door was shut closed
The foolish could not enter as they had supposed
They said, "Sir, Open the door for us too!"
But he replied, "I don't know you."
Therefore keep watch, let the Spirit empower.
For you do not know the day or the hour.

<http://www.bcbsr.com/survey/pbl20.html>

Let that be a lesson to us,
especially as we take into account our responsibility
to properly plan for and provide the resources we need –
not only to make our mortgage payments,
but to do our mission in the world.

Still there is another way of looking at this parable...

Earlier in September,
I referred to Megan McKenna's interpretation of
that corrupt steward who had been price gouging
and cooking the books, but then realized helping people
would be a better investment in the long run.
She also interpreted today's story from the perspective
of Third World poor people.

The foolish maidens in this story are like the poor
who never have enough – whether it is food or fuel.
When word comes that the bridegroom will soon be there,
they beg the wise maidens for help – to share the oil.
The prudent ones who had properly prepared themselves
were within their rights to turn these others away.

Willard, p.4

And so they go off into the middle of the night
to search for the oil they desperately need – and they find it!
This is like another one of Jesus’ parables
about the person who comes to beg help from his neighbor
He needed some bread because of unexpected visitors
who arrived in the middle of the night.
And Jesus said that this neighbor helped him –
not because he was a friend, but because of his desperate plea.

So, it is amazing that these poor maidens were able to come up
with that oil from somewhere after midnight.

And they did it

because they were determined to do it.

The parable then says that the gate was locked upon their return
and when they called to the bridegroom, he said,
“I don’t know you.”

McKenna points to this harsh response as being more like
the way of the world than the way of God.

About this time last year, our church had its Stewardship drive
and realized the pledges came up too short
to support the budget.

So, an emergency appeal was made to the congregation
at the “11th hour” before the Annual Meeting
to vote on the budget.

And people responded with heroic measures to resuscitate our church;
And I have heard this told with some pride –
but also with the realization that this is not the way
we want to manage our finances every year.

But it is important to know that where there is a will,
there will be a way – or more to the point,
if our purpose is aligned with God’s will,
there will be a way through, or a lesson to be learned
with purpose in it.

The lesson from Colossians speaks of the centrality of Christ –
that all things hold together through Jesus Christ.

We can’t fail, because God is with us – God through Christ is with us;
God’s purpose is intimately woven in with that
community of faith called the Christian church.

Willard, p.5

As the United Church of Christ at The Villages,
we are part of that great purpose – so long as we do our part
to keep the engine well-oiled, so to speak
and make sure the lamp of faith stays lit.

As far as winning the lottery to solve all our problems –
don't count on that.

But let's make the effort now to properly prepare
for the adventures ahead of serving God through Christ.

And let's not be like that person whom God tells in a dream
“You are going to win the lottery tomorrow!”
The day comes and goes without so much as a phone call –
but that night in a dream, God says,
“Help me out here – next time buy a ticket!”

Don't expect God to do all the work – get involved!
Amen

The church of the Colossians was being influenced by religious teachings

that competed with Christianity at that time.

In Colossians 1:11-20,

the Apostle Paul makes a strong appeal for them to know

that Christ has dominion over all of the universe

and it is upon Christ alone they are to depend...

11 May you be made strong with all the strength

that comes from his glorious power,

and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience,

while joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father,

who has enabled you to share in the inheritance

of the saints in the light.

13 He has rescued us from the power of darkness

and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son,

¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;

¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created,

things visible and invisible,

whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—

all things have been created through him and for him.

17 He himself is before all things,

and in him all things hold together.

18 He is the head of the body, the church;

he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,

so that he might come to have first place in everything.

19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

²⁰and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself

all things, whether on earth or in heaven,

by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Matt.25:1-11

[Jesus said,]

[1] "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

[2] Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

[3] For when the foolish took their lamps,
they took no oil with them;

[4] but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

[5] As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

[6] But at midnight there was a cry,
'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'

[7] Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps.

[8] And the foolish said to the wise,

'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'

[9] But the wise replied,

'Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you;
go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.'

[10] And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came,
and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage
feast;

and the door was shut.

[11] Afterward the other maidens came also, saying,

'Lord, lord, open to us.'

[12] But he replied,

'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

[13] Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.