

November 12, 2017 – Peace in the Soul

Matthew 25:1-13

Every Wednesday night the Knox Hall Gym is filled with the sound of children learning and having fun together. That is the night that the Beavers and Scouts meet for their weekly meetings. I know that some of the members of our Sunday School are part of that group and some of their parents provide leadership.

Personally I have never been involved in the Scout movement, but I do know the Scout motto. I'm sure many of you do too. What is it? *(leave time for answers)*

Yes, it is "Be Prepared."

What do you think the Scouts are supposed to be prepared for? Well according to the founder of the movement, Robert Baden-Powell, the motto means "you are always in a state of readiness in mind and body to do your duty." He goes on to say this includes "having thought out beforehand any accident or situation that might occur, so that you know the right thing to do at the right moment, and are willing to do it" and "making yourself strong and active and able to do the right thing at the right moment." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scout_Motto#Baden-Powell_on_.22Be_Prepared.22

This is what it means to "Be Prepared" if you are a Scout.

Today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew, one of Jesus' parables, is also about being prepared. In the gospel we find ten bridal attendants waiting at the groom's home. The groom, after preparing the honeymoon bedroom, has now gone to collect his bride and bring her back for the consummation of their marriage. The bridal attendants each have a lamp so they can light the way for

the bridal party. All of the attendants have oil in their lamps, but only five have brought an extra jar.

For some reason the groom is delayed. When the bridal party is finally getting close, all of the attendants' lamps are running out of oil and the foolish ones, the ones that did not bring an extra jar, are forced to go and buy some more. By the time they get back it was too late, the bridal party has already entered the house and the door is shut. They can't even get in. The parable ends with Jesus saying, "So stay awake, for you don't know the day or the hour."

Jesus is telling his followers that they need to be prepared, prepared for something that cannot be scheduled – that they must be vigilant, that they must stay awake. But what is it that they must be prepared for? Well if we go back to the beginning of the passage, we find a clue. Jesus began his parable by saying, "Then again, the kingdom of heaven could be likened to." Jesus is telling his followers that waiting for the bridal party is like waiting for God's kingdom, God's reign of peace and justice on earth. Jesus is telling his followers and is telling us that we need to be prepared so that we can do our part to not only welcome but also create that place of peace. Jesus is calling us to "be prepared."

So if we are supposed to be prepared to welcome and to even create God's kingdom of peace and justice, what does that mean? Robert Baden-Powell, said that being prepared means "you are always in a state of readiness in mind and body to do your duty." Do you think this is what Jesus was talking about? I would say, "Yes and..." Certainly Jesus wanted his followers to have healthy

minds and bodies that would allow them to do the right thing in emergency situations. But I believe that Jesus was asking his followers to go even further in their preparations. I believe that Jesus was talking about more than just physical and mental preparation. I believe that Jesus is also calling us to be spiritually prepared.

So what does it mean to be spiritually prepared? As I was writing my sermon this week I did what I often do and I googled the phrase “spiritual preparedness.” Suddenly in front of me were all these websites from the Church of the Latter Day Saints. It turns out this particular phrase is really popular with our Mormon neighbours. I quickly realized that their understanding is slightly different than mine. I read lots of stories of being prepared to pray and to put ourselves in God’s hands in emergency situations and, even more prevalent, were lists of ways to make sure that we end up in heaven when our time comes. But I believe that spiritual preparedness is more about how we live on earth. I believe that spiritual preparedness is about connecting with the Ground of Our Being, with Holy Mystery, in all aspects of our lives. I believe that spiritual preparedness is about being awake to God’s loving presence in every moment.

Like many of you I will never forget the morning of 9/11. I was a theological student at that time and I was on my way to class when I heard the horrible news from New York City. Within two hours of the initial crash I was lucky enough to be sitting amongst classmates and staff in the chapel at Knox College on the campus of the University of Toronto. What struck me about that moment was that in the midst of the fear and the horror, one of the professors had the spiritual preparedness to pray for a peaceful and compassionate response to that act of

terror. While I was still numb from the news, he had the presence of mind and spirit to pray that the president of the United States and other global leaders would make decisions based on wisdom and grace instead of fear.

Being spiritually prepared is being ready to react from a place of love and peace when someone threatens us or speaks to us in an angry or even condescending tone. Being spiritually prepared is being ready with a smile and an empathetic ear even in the midst of an incredibly frustrating and hectic day. Being spiritually prepared is having the ability to notice the beauty of a falling snowflake while shovelling our driveway for the third time in the same day.

So how do we do that? How do we get to that place in our lives? Well, like everything else, it takes training and it takes practice. What are the things that we do to help us become spiritually prepared? You tell me. I know you already have the answers. *(leave time for answers - read scripture, study, read books, spend time in nature, go to church, sleep, walk, sing, pray, meditate)* Yes, all of these activities are part of our preparation. We need to do whatever it takes to cultivate peace within ourselves. We need to do whatever it takes to tap into that place within each one of us that is the sacred.

The Buddha would tell us that "Peace comes from within, do not seek it without" and I believe that Jesus gave us the same teaching in this parable. He asked us to remain awake, to remain present to the love, the peace and the grace of God in everything we do. Today we sang the hymn *Peace for the Children* and in the last verse we got to the most important phrase, we sang, "Following the path of the One of peace, we work for healing, we work for peace; peace in the soul

today.” Being spiritually prepared is about holding the peace of God in our souls so that every day we are part of the creation of God’s kindom of heaven on earth.