

THE STORY OF THE



BRIDESMAIDS

Matthew 25:1-13

This really is a weird story. Why doesn't the groom show up for his own wedding until midnight? Why does the bride — whoever she is — put up with such a ridiculous delay? Where even *is* the bride in this story?

And why, after keeping his poor bridesmaids waiting for hours, does the groom blame *them* for lateness — and shut his door in their faces? You too must have lots of questions running around your heads when you read this parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids in Matthew 25: 1-13.

This is a story about the coming of God's kingdom, which will be ushered in whenever the second coming of Jesus happens. You see, Christians believe that there is going to be a wedding (the coming of God's Kingdom) someday. The truth is, many of us have grown accustomed to the bridegroom's absence. It is such a long time ago when Jesus made this promise to his followers. Perhaps, deep in our secret hearts, we no longer believe he's going to return. We no longer believe there's going to be a wedding. But the problem with letting go of the second coming of Jesus is two-fold: One, we have to make Jesus a liar in order to do it. Jesus said that he will return, just as surely as he said he would be crucified, buried, and resurrected on

the third day. On what grounds shall we choose to disbelieve a stated promise of the Risen Christ?

And second, the coming of God's kingdom in all of its healing, justice-making fullness is the yardstick against which we must measure all of our own healing, justice-making efforts. The wedding feast is our ideal, our goal, our destination. Without it, we have no standard.

No accountability. Nothing to lean into, nothing to work towards, nothing to anticipate as we labour in God's name.

The parable of the bridesmaids ends with a wedding. It ends in celebration and joy. We dare not abandon this glorious ending simply because we've grown tired of waiting. There is going to be a wedding someday!

The bridesmaids have to wait so long for the groom's arrival, they fall asleep. But five of the bridesmaids who carry extra oil prepare themselves for the long haul, just in case. They consider and take seriously the

possibility of surprise, of delay, of hardship, of unpredictability.

Are we ready for the long haul? Can we handle the unexpected? Or, are we clinging to rigid, narrow notions of what God's presence looks like, such that we miss God when God actually shows up?

Sometimes doors close, so maybe we need to do what is needful now. The five 'foolish' bridesmaids arrive too late to gain entrance to the wedding. Doors close, chances fade, time runs out. Surely this parable is telling us to be alert now, awake now. Tomorrow, if it comes, will be its own gift, its own miracle, its own challenge. Don't presume it belongs to you. Do what is holy and necessary now.

The biggest mistake the five 'foolish' bridesmaids make is that they leave. They assume that their oil supply is more important to the groom than their presence at his party. They did not realise that they all were more

valuable than their oil supply. And we are so like the five 'foolish' bridesmaids. It is hard to stick around when our own light is fading and our reserves are low. We feel our own faith evaporating, especially whenever we are feeling nothing but doubt and pain, grief and weariness. Only a bridesmaid who trusts in the groom's deep and unconditional compassion, only a bridesmaid who knows the groom has light and oil to spare, only a bridesmaid who understands that her presence is of intrinsic value to the groom (Jesus), will find the



honesty and the courage to stay. We need to have the

courage to show up as we are. The groom delights in you, not your lamp. Your light doesn't have to dazzle. Remember, God created light. God is light. And Jesus is the light of the world. Your half-empty flask of oil isn't the point. You are, so stay.

With thanks to the work of Debie Thomas

