

Scripture:

Matthew 25:1-13

“The right focus.”

The great Victorian poet ----- Alfred Lord Tennyson writes -----

Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill!
 Late, late, so late! but we can enter still.
 Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.

No light had we: for that we do repent;
 And learning this, the bridegroom will relent.
 Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.

No light: so late! and dark and chill the night!
 O, let us in, that we may find the light!
 Too late, too late: ye cannot enter now.

Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet?
 O, let us in, tho' late, to kiss his feet!
 No, no, too late! ye cannot enter now."

From the poem ----- Guinevere ----- about 170 lines in.

What begins ----- late ---- late ----- so late.

Ends in ----- late ---- late ---- too late.

There is late ---- 5 --- 10 ----- 15 ---- 20 ---30 --- 40 minutes late.

And then there is so late ----- an hour --- 2 ----- maybe 3 hours --- still a
 chance to be a part of whatever started a few hours ago.

And then there is too late ---- where the opportunity is lost -----the event is
 over ----- or at the very least the chance to be a part of the event is over -----
 and you've missed out on it.

Few things in life are as final as being too late.

“No --- no ----- too late ---- you cannot enter now.” ----- are sad --- final -
 --- close the door in your face words ----- they’re ---- “It’s over for you!” ----
 - words.

Not being too late ---- being on time --- or least close enough to on time ----
 such that you still allow yourself to be a part of it all ----- requires the right
 focus.

The right focus.

In Matthew’s gospel today we hear a story about the importance of focus
 and timeliness.

In the Middle East at the time of Christ a wedding took place in significantly
 different ways than it does today.

Bride’s waited in their new matrimonial home for the groom to arrive and
 the marriage ceremony to begin.

And they waited --- what could be a day ----- 2 days --- a few days ----- a
 week perhaps even ----- no one knew how long they might wait.

And as they did their bridesmaids would dance and sing and process in the
 village streets celebrating and keeping an eye out for the groom who could
 arrive at any time --- unannounced.

On seeing him the bridesmaids would hurry off to the bride and let her know
 her husband was on the way and that they had to make the final
 arrangements as the ceremony would begin on his arrival at their home.

So the bridesmaids had to be attentive and focused on the right things ---
 keeping an eye out for the groom --- and not just get caught up in the
 dancing and singing they were to offer.

And one of the great things to do ---- at least from the groom’s perspective --
 --- was to try to catch the bridal party resting ----- and so arriving in the
 dark at night often happened.

So it was essential that you have a lamp with oil to fulfill your duty as a
 bridesmaid.

And in Matthew's gospel passage today ---- sure enough the groom comes at night --- and the bridal party is awoken with the much anticipated shouts of -
 --- "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" ----- as verse 6 from Matthew's gospel today includes.

"Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" --- come the shouts in the dark of the night.

But unfortunately ---- for half of the wedding party --- they are out of oil.

And because of this --- after being told they can't borrow any oil ----- they make a quick exit and try to go and buy some ----- and ultimately because of this ----- they miss out on the ceremony and celebrations.

Verse 10 ---- "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with them to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut."

And the custom was --- once the door was shut --- it remained shut --- no one went in or out ----- and that was that --- no exceptions.

Too late --- opportunity lost --- moment passed ----- it's over for those who ran short on oil.

So you really had to have the right focus ---- be prepared --- have what you need --- and not get caught at the least minute --- unprepared or lacking focus.

Pretty straightforward.

I think the modern day equivalent would be something like the husband of a pregnant woman ----- hopping in the car to take his wife to the hospital when she is in labour --- only to find out the car is out of gas --- and isn't going to make it to the hospital.

Bad news boy ----- good luck with that one buddy ----- she won't soon forget this and ----- perhaps most important of all ----- it's too late now.

It's too late now to go and get gas --- that window is gone.

Somewhere along the line ---- the husband lost focus.

The parable in Matthew's gospel reminds us to not lose focus --- to be ready.

And ----- it teaches us ----- that some things cannot be obtained at the last minute ----- and that some things cannot be borrowed.

Some things cannot be obtained at the last minute ----- and some things cannot be borrowed.

The bridesmaids couldn't get the oil they needed at the last minute without also missing out on the wedding ceremony and party.

The husband ----- with his wife in active labour standing in the driveway ready to go ----- cannot get the gas he needs at the last minute ---- it's too late.

Some things can be left to the last minute and others can't.

And it takes a little focus and a little forethought to distinguish between what can be left to another time --- and what can't be.

Jesus drives the point home that certain things cannot be pushed aside until later --- because if they are it just may be too late.

You can't decide to study for an exam the night before and expect to do very well --- it's too late.

You can't clean the snow off your car ---- at least not easily --- if you didn't first put the brush in before the first snowfall --- it's too late.

And the list goes on.

Some things in life are timely and always will be timely --- no amount of quick thinking --- relaxed attitude --- or flexibility can solve certain lateness.

And if we take what Jesus is saying seriously in Matthew's gospel today ---- maybe just maybe part of what He's saying is that preparing ourselves to meet God is probably not something we want to leave to the last minute.

Yes things may work out O.K. --- God is gracious ----- but do we really want to take that chance --- and leave it to the very last minute to make this kind of preparation?

Wouldn't it be far better to have the right focus --- and think about things like meeting God now --- with a little bit of time on our side?

There's the story that when Queen Mary the second ----Queen of England, Scotland and Ireland was on her deathbed in 1694 her chaplain came to her to speak of salvation in Christ --- and she replied with something like --- "Please Reverend --- know that I have not left this matter to this hour."

"Know I have not left this matter to this hour." ----- requires a little bit of focus and prioritizing ----- recognition of what can be left until later and what ought not be left until later.

At first it seems kind of harsh ---- rude and --- un-Christian ----- for the 5 bridesmaids who had oil not to share it with those who quickly ran out --- some of the party didn't have enough --- why wouldn't they share what they have --- there might just be enough to go around after all?

It seems the point is simple --- some things cannot be borrowed.

Maybe the oil could have been ---- maybe there actually would have been enough oil to go around and those who had it could have shared it and everything would have worked out for all ----- who really knows ----- but either way --- what we do know is that the point stands --- some things cannot be borrowed.

A relationship with God --- cannot be borrowed --- accepting Christ as Lord and as Saviour cannot be borrowed from someone else --- it's something you have to do yourself.

Similarly ----- we can't borrow character.

We can't borrow honesty.

We can't borrow integrity.

We can't borrow hard work --- diligence.

Some things simply cannot be borrowed.

And interestingly enough many of those things that we cannot borrow ----- also cannot be obtained at the last minute.

The 5 virgins --- the 5 bridesmaids very quickly learn that some things cannot be obtained at the last minute --- and that some things cannot be borrowed.

They quickly learn that yes there are things that we can be late with ----- there are even things that we can be so late --- or very late with ----- and then there are also those things that we can be too late with.

To be too late --- not just late --- or so late --- or very late ----- but **too** late can be a huge tragedy.

Oh but what about ----- "God is gracious and compassionate --- slow to anger --- patient --- forgiving --- rich in love."

What about ----- "God is quick to forgive ----- surely it's never too late with God is it?"

Maybe --- maybe not ----- what is Jesus saying in Matthew's gospel.

He does say ----- "The kingdom of heaven will be like ----- therefore keep watch --- because you do not know the day or the hour." --- in verse 13 today.

He does say ----- "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." --- in Matthew chapter 7 verse 21.

Clearly there is such a thing as too late --- where and when and how and why exactly ----- the concept of too late applies ----- only God knows.

What we do know for certain is that Jesus tells this story ----- a story that very clearly draws a definite line between --- late --- so late ----- and then finally --- too late.

And it's worth noting that ----- it's not as though the bridesmaids who ended up being too late --- where out to lunch.

They were there ---- they showed up ready to go --- they had all of what they needed ----- they just ran short on one account ---- fuel.

“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.”” --- verses 7 and 8 from Matthew's gospel today.

“Our lamps are going out.” ----- they had the lamps --- they had some oil --- they responded --- they woke up ---- they trimmed the wicks ----- they were mostly ready ---- prepared ----- focused ---- but just not quite.

Not a problem --- they think ---- “We'll borrow what we need.” ---- but as we see ----- that didn't happen.

Not a problem ---- “We'll get some at the market.” ----- and as we soon see that too ----- didn't happen.

Or at least that's not in a timeframe that allows them to get back in good time.

Instead ----- they are too late.

And ---- “Too late” -----almost always ends in regret.

And regret --- is no fun at all.

Why work through regret when you can work through staying focused and doing those things that absolutely have to be done in a timely manner ---- with the right focus.

A Christ inspired and directed focus ----- is the mindset and way of being that pays attention to those things that cannot be obtained at the last minute - -- and those things that cannot be borrowed at the last minute if at all.

Think about what cannot be obtained at the last minute and what cannot be borrowed.

A disposition that is pleasing to God.

A disposition that is open to God.

The cultivation of a deep ---- genuine ----- faithful ----- relationship with God.

Authentic --- lay it on the line ----- everything is up for grabs ---- wrestling with what really matters in life.

Matters of faith ----- and life and death --- the cut to the core kind of stuff that truly counts in life.

Perhaps what Jesus is saying in this parable is that these things --- the things that really matter in life ----- are best not left to the last minute ----- and cannot be borrowed from someone else.

I think it's safe to say that weddings are notorious events for people lacking focus.

People are often far more concerned with how they look at weddings than what's going on inside of them.

Is the dress --- is my hair ---- are the bows ---- the candles ---- the cake --- the table settings --- the napkins --- the pictures ----- the seating ----- the décor ----- etc. ----- etc. ----- etc. ----- all perfect.

Instead of ----- “Wow ----- this is amazing ---- the one I love the most --- and all the people we love the most are here. ----- God is good --- He's given me someone to love --- and someone who loves me ----- and we're getting married --- today ----- were committing ourselves to each other before God and all these people ----- this is awesome.”

That usually gets smushed up ----- lost somewhere between ----- is this --- is that --- are this and that --- just so.

It's not by mistake that Jesus uses the example of a wedding to drive the point home about lack of ----- or losing focus.

Weddings require a huge amount of planning and preparation for sure.

But unfortunately too often weddings are also fine examples of lost focus.

Anyone can get married ---- it's staying married that matters ---- and too often the focus is all wrong ---- it's on getting married only and not also staying married.

Half of the people --- 5 of the 10 virgins --- who planned the wedding in Matthew's gospel today ----- aren't even around when the ceremony actually takes place.

All because of what.

All because of lack of focus.

Focusing on all the wrong things.

Some things cannot be obtained at the last minute.

Some things cannot be borrowed.

Isn't that the true point of this parable?

Stay focused on what really matters.

Stay focused on those things that may take a lifetime to figure out.

There is late ----- there is so late --- there is very late --- there is even very very late ----- and then there is too late ----- opportunity lost kind of late.

Isn't Jesus saying ---- focus on those things that really matter --- focus on those things that you don't ever want to be too late for.

Too late usually ends with regret.

You can work through regret --- door closed ----- opportunity over.

Or you can work on discernment ----- focusing on the right and faithful things.

According to Jesus today the kingdom of heaven will be like this parable.

Some will be foolish and some will be wise.

And there won't be any middle ground.

Some things cannot be obtained at the last minute.

Some things cannot be borrowed.

Our job is to stay focused on what really matters in life.

And to recognize the difference between what we can be a little late on --- and what we cannot be late at all on.

The time to cultivate the gift of faith is now.

Amen.