

Sermon 2023 11 12 Text

The name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Companion on the Journey. Amen.

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Foolishness and wisdom.

Five wise bridesmaids wait for the bridegroom, and five foolish bridesmaids wait for the bridegroom.

What distinguishes them is that wise have come with extra oil for their lamps in case the bridegroom is late, while five are unprepared for a long wait.

Perhaps a good bridegroom, like a good bride, would have been on time (or perhaps even a little early) and the wisdom or foolishness of the bridesmaids would not have been an issue.

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But the bridegroom we speak of is the returning Christ – whose hour of returning we do not know, but for whom we are ever watchful.

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The essence of the Gospel story is our preparedness to be embraced by Christ in the moment of his returning; and in that moment to be ready to leave this life and to enter eternal life.

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The implication of the Gospel is that people of wisdom are prepared to enter into the glory of God in the moment of the appearance of the Christ.

AND that the people of foolishness are in some way not ready to go.

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Standing against this apparently good advice is a simple fact – that when the Christ appears we will go; whether we are wise or foolish, prepared or not.

We will have no need for a light for our path, for Christ will be our light and will guide our footsteps. And if we trip Christ will help us to stand.

And we will all walk into that eternal place prepared for us.

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As I read scripture, there is a whole body of evidence of wisdom and foolishness which ends up being quite confusing.

Wisdom, at varying times, is seen as both a worthwhile and an unnecessary thing.

Foolishness, at varying times, is both criticised, and seen as a valuable characteristic to possess.

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We might start at Proverbs 9:10, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”

Or we might wander into 1 Corinthians 4.10 we are told:-
We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ.
We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but
we in disrepute.

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So, in Scripture wisdom and foolishness are both praised and
criticised; both held up as worthy states; both held as places we
should not be.

Certainly, in society, and in our best views of ourselves, those
of us who are sensible aspire to wisdom. While others are
prepared to do the most outrageous of things for foolish fame.

On the one hand those who seek wisdom seek the laudable
qualities of having experience, knowledge, and good
judgement; based on sensible thinking.

While a fool shows a lack of wisdom or good judgment; and
illogical qualities; they indulge in ridiculous talk, ideas, or
behaviour.

But then again in 1 Corinthians 4, Paul says, “We are fools for
the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ.”

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The Christ turns our world upside down, we are give new
values, new priorities, new living, and new dying in this world.

Our prudent value system is uprooted, and the focus is
changed from the logical care of self and those important to us
to a universal, even a love for our enemies which compromises
a hard-wired system of values within us.

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We reach out to the untouchables, we embrace the leper, and we welcome those who are in every way unacceptable.

And we struggle new systems of values within ourselves.

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In my view, the outcome of the parable is quite wrong. Those who were wise left behind those who were foolish. Those who were called wise, allowed the foolish to be punished for their foolishness. As people of faith, we may seek wisdom, but we use our wisdom to care not only for ourselves, but also for those who are foolish.

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The wise bridesmaids would have shared their oil with the foolish so that all could have accompanied the bridegroom.

As people of faith, we accept risk, ridicule and rejection, because our sole motivation is love, not judging another because of their faults.

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“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ... pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into (the) harvest.”
Matthew 9:37–38

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