DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES
The United Methodist Church

8
Nov

Keep Awake

It Will Be Like This

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR A

Keep your lamps trimmed and burning, the day is drawing nigh. This week's parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids isn't about judgment, but about staying present with one another and keeping awake to what God is doing among us here and now.

REFERENCES

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25
Psalm 78:1-7
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25:1-13

COLORS

Green

Planning Worship

> *Artificial intelligence is shaping the lives of our congregations, and worship can make room for the questions it raises. Our companion guide, Keeping Awake, Awaiting Dawn, offers direction for addressing AI in worship during this season.*

Focus text: Matthew 25:1–13

Keep your lamps trimmed and burning,
keep your lamps trimmed and burning,
keep your lamps trimmed and burning,
the day is drawing nigh.

(African American Spiritual, public domain)

Every time I read this Sunday's gospel lesson, I feel this African American spiritual resonating in my bones. I've sung multiple arrangements over the years, but the simplest, most straightforward versions are the best. It's just you, a chorus of other people, and this powerful marriage of tune and text sinking into the marrow, echoes of hope in the midst of profound and unjust suffering, a musical witness to the persistent belief that the good news of Jesus defies the power of the oppressor. I could wax poetic about this spiritual all day, but lest you think this is only for churches with large choirs, there is a singable, public domain version here that congregations of all sizes can sing. I'm not recommending that your congregation sing "Keep Your Lamps" this Sunday just because it directly references Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids. Rather, this is an opportunity for the whole community to sing an interpretation of this text together. Through a simple, repetitive text paired with a minor tune full of pathos sung in community with others, "Keep Your Lamps" interprets Matthew 25:1-13 by drawing us toward one another, calling us to persevere in the midst of—not despite—the difficulties we face. Through this spiritual, the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids becomes not about judgment but about leaning in, supporting one another, and reminding one another that through Christ and in community together, we have hope.

Throughout this series, we're using the gospel texts in the lectionary to explore how Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven. It's striking to me that Jesus doesn't give us a list of action items complete with timelines, quotas, and scheduled progress reports. Imagine having a monthly check-in with Jesus: "The goal is world peace. We laid out a plan to make it happen, and you are, let's see, two thousand years overdue on all tasks. Help me help you figure out the barriers here so we can make some progress."

But no, we don't have a business plan or to-do lists. We have stories--stories that are culturally specific to Jesus' day, yet all-too-human. We have parables that we, unfortunately, often read at a surface level when deeper meanings await us if we will stop and pay attention. So, this week, as you explore what it means to keep awake, consider the stories that shape your community. Where do some of those stories need a little extra light and attention? What are the stories we've forgotten or neglected? What are the stories that we need to replace about ourselves and our community so

we can stay awake to what God is doing among us? Perhaps these aren't questions we, as worship planners, must answer, but the questions we need to raise with our congregations in worship because the questions keep us awake and attentive to the work God lays before us to build the kingdom of heaven here and now.

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