

A Sermon Preached at Maple Street Congregational Church, UCC
Danvers, MA
Rev. Kevin M Smith
November 12, 2017
Matthew 25:1-13

Just Sleep on It

In first century Palestine, when one was about to be married, the groom would often spend hours and hours at the home of the bride chatting with and even negotiating the marriage contract with the bride's family, probably the father. I suspect in the Jewish culture of that time there were very few "shotgun" weddings or elopements. Marriage was truly a contract between consenting parties beyond just the bride and groom. When the marriage contract negotiations were over, the evening could be long past and darkness could be thick in the night. The wedding party who had readied the feast back at the groom's home could be left standing around waiting for hours and hours.

In our particular gospel story today, some of the attendants were prepared for the long haul of waiting that night. As they went out to the road to light the bride and groom's way back to the home of the groom, or the groom's family, some of the wedding attendants brought with them plenty of oil to keep the flames of their lights going. These maidens or attendants, especially the wise ones, realized they needed to be prepared for the coming of their master at any time. When the darkness grew and grew and there was still no sign of the wedding party, sleep fell over them, especially over the ones in the party who knew they had brought enough oil with them to keep their torches lit for the long wait. Those with enough extra oil, with enough trust and patience, were prepared and could turn the night over to a feeling of peace, security, and anticipation.

Unfortunately, others who were not so wise failed to prepare themselves for the long haul; they probably did not rest too comfortably in their sleep. Instead of preparing themselves to let go of their worries, they probably tossed and turned and fretted counting the moments left of their precious oil. They had not prepared in a way in which they could just let go of their worry and turn the night over to God.

So often in our rush-rush days and nights and eagerness to fix our problems and personal concerns it seems we try everything to help ourselves get over our depressions, or anxieties or worries about our lives. We fret and fret and often times just keep finding ourselves bumping into brick walls of uncertainty or remorse or the frustration that life just isn't going the way we think it should. I once had a boss who taught me a very good lesson. He said, "Kevin, there is very little in this life that you have to decide or fix immediately, that cannot wait for a good night's sleep. So often it happens that when facing a decision the best thing to do is to just let go of it and approach it again the next morning." I still find this to be very good advice today after many years have passed since I first heard this advice. When I've made all the preparations I can make, or when I've wracked my wits to come up with an answer to a problem that is particularly vexing, or when I just get frustrated in general with life at the moment and I've reached the end of my self, the best course of action to take is inaction, or

letting go and handing the moments and anxieties over to God. And most of the time, in the letting go will come insight into the path I ought to take. By simply just letting go of the anxiety and trusting in God, I am able to let the time decide—God nurtures this time.

Having frustrations and anxieties can be places of real loneliness. Sometimes out of shame, or embarrassment, or fear, we keep our anxieties and fears bottled up inside us. We wait in solitude for something to happen. We make ourselves sole practitioners trying to heal ourselves. But often, facing life's roadblocks and rough roads alone is simply just a prescription for doubling the doubt and worry of whatever is bothering us. Allowing ourselves the license to share our concerns and worries, and yes, even our most private thoughts with others can often be another way, in addition to prayer, of relieving our most vexing burdens. Simply just talking about it with a trusted friend or neighbor, or one who is trained in the arts of listening and affirming can allow us the release we need. By letting go we get back. By turning it over we gain freedom.

When you have done it all, when you have prepared for everything, when all the steps have been taken, when you have reached the end of your rope and there is nothing left to do—there is still one more thing you can do—turn it over to God. Let go and receive back in return. Sometimes the things we can let go of and give to God are huge, sometimes they are little stuff—like the things that others do that make you angry; like that huge project at work into which you have put all your blood, sweat and tears.

Sometimes God's answers or solutions will be what you expected; but often times you may be surprised that you may not have received all you wanted, but you probably received what you needed. The gift you have received may not have even been what you imagined, but it may just be the most fulfilling gift you needed. Sometimes the quest you embark on to get relief can be so much more fruitful if you can share the journey, let the time decide, and keep enough oil being prepared for the long haul, the long night, and having faith in God present within you helps you to be open to receive, perhaps not necessarily want you wanted, but what you truly needed. Amen.

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