

The Church of Saint Pascal Baylon

Fr. Mike Byron, Pastor: Sunday Homily

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There are at least a half dozen dental offices within a 10 minute walk of the place where I live. I pass by them all the time, and in some cases I wouldn't even have to go outside in order to be treated there. But no. My dentist's office is in Edina, which means that for every time I go there I have to wall off about three hours of a day, so as not to get caught up in unexpected traffic both coming and going. I have been going there for decades, and for exactly two reasons. One is that I really like the hygienist who works on my teeth and who really likes me as her patient. The other is that, unlike my previous dentist, I never have to wait in the outside office, reading the boring magazines until they get around to allowing me in. If I have an appointment at 3:00 PM, they are ready for me at 2:55. I consider that an important sign of respect for my time and the effort that I make to get there.

I've never seriously considered making a change until this year. Twice now I've been made to wait in the lobby for up to about 20 minutes after my scheduled time. Unlike the virgins in today's gospel, when that happens to me I don't fall asleep, I get very irritated—and I make sure they know about it, politely. An appointment is a kind of contract of understanding: I show up when we agree I should, and you're ready for me when I arrive. And when that fails to happen, I'm not interested in explanations. I'm just upset, because I feel that I've been disrespected. It's not as if I have nothing else to do, and I plan my day on the assumption that my appointment will be honored, more or less.

In that sense, I have a great deal more sympathy for the so-called "foolish" virgins in the gospel than Jesus seems to have. They all showed up in time to greet the bridegroom, with sufficient oil in their lamps to welcome him at the time of his expected arrival.

And then, without any explanation, he doesn't show up. The gospel tells us that he was "long delayed." And then it is *they* who get blamed and locked out of the wedding banquet. If I were one of those allegedly "foolish" virgins and had a bit of courage I would demand an explanation from the *bridegroom*: "And just where were you all this time, knowing that we were waiting, and how is this our fault rather than yours? Who are *you* to scold *us*?"

It would be an understandable sentiment, I think. The problem, though, is that while I can change dentists if I want, I can't change bridegrooms. Nobody can. Because the bridegroom here is Christ, who doesn't seem to feel that he owes us explanations in the face of apparent delay, no matter how upsetting we may feel that to be. Our choice and theirs is either to wait on *this* bridegroom, no matter what, or to despair. Because there is no other bridegroom. And it's that "no matter what" part that can be so difficult.

The first Christians felt it too—the people to whom Matthew addressed this gospel in the first place. Their burning question was, "Where *IS* he? Why is it taking so long for his return?" (Does that sound familiar today?) And if there is no explanation offered, then the next question becomes, "What are we to be doing while we wait?" To that question the gospel offers two possible responses:

1. To be *wise* is to be ready to wait on Jesus Christ and his return without conditions, and to make every effort to do his will, to be church, to be ready, until the day.
2. To be *foolish* is to do nothing, to fall asleep, and to expect some other people to bail us out when the time comes—and it *is* coming—and they won't.

It's a pretty clear choice, even if it's not always an easy one. It can be demanding to do the will of God, to stay committed during this "time in between," to be ready to sacrifice and to live with a certain kind of unknowing about when and how his return will be. But what we do know for now is that we must be busy about the preparations, setting the table for the coming banquet. That means being church here and now.

And that means doing what we can, offering up our gifts day-to-day, year-to-year, in order to be ready when the banquet hall opens for us. It means stewardship. This weekend and next here at St. Pascal's we are dedicating to our annual reminder of who and how we are asked to be as followers of our Lord, especially in the way that we offer our gifts—whatever they may be—to the mission of our parish. As in years past, I have asked one of our faithful parishioners to offer a testimony—three minutes or less—as to the importance of stewardship.

(Introduction of Anne Weyandt)