Matthew 25:1-13; Amos 5:18-24; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 **Rev. Pauline Farrington**
November 8, 2026, Pentecost + 24 **Trinity, North Bethesda**

(Texts are included in the Word document, available along with the sermon manuscript.)

Sometimes, in our Communion liturgy
we proclaim the mystery of faith:
Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.
It's a statement about past, present, and future.
Christ *has* died. Christ *is* risen. Christ *will* come again.
It expresses what we believe in
and know about the past and present in Christ
and, because of that, what we hope
for the future —
that Christ will come again.
What does that coming again
mean, though?
What is it that we think were waiting for?
What will happen?
What do we expect
on the day of the Lord?

Theodore Parker was an American abolitionist,
Unitarian minister,
and a Transcendentalist.
In a sermon in 1853,
he said that he couldn't calculate
the curve of the moral universe
through his sight alone,
but his conscience assured him
it bends toward justice.

Martin Luther King, Jr., in the 1960s,
adapted that statement and made it memorable:
"The arc of the moral universe is long,
but it bends toward justice."
He used it not as a passive guarantee,
but as a call
for unfaltering moral and political action.

We look for the day of the Lord
to be one in which justice
rolls down like water
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
According to Amos,
we might want to be careful
what we wish for.
It might be more darkness than light.
We might not be able to escape it.
There might be no place to find rest from it.
Every week we perform all our
rituals and practices of worship,
but are they just empty pretense?
Are they all just for show on Sunday while,
Monday through Saturday,
we deny justice to those
who are suffering
even though we have the power
to alleviate it?
Maybe on that day of justice and righteousness
we don't want to be caught on the
uncomfortable side
of the ever-flowing stream.

So, what if we go ahead and work
for the coming of that day
of justice and righteousness
now?
What if we participate
in the moral arc now?

It's hard though.
It's hard to be living and acting,
and participating
as if it's already here
while we're still waiting for it.
Especially when the wait seems so long.

And Jesus doesn't really give us a lot to go on.
When he and the disciples were leaving the temple

(just days before his arrest and death)
he told them
to look at the stones of the temple
and says they'll all be thrown down.
He told them about the siege of
Jerusalem and its destruction.
Now they're sitting together on the mount of olives,
across from the temple.
(They likely can see it from where they sit.)
And the disciples ask him when these things will happen.
He responds with some warnings
and advice and tells them
no one knows when.
Then he tells a series of stories.
In today's story,
he says it will be like a wedding party
where the bridegroom
is later than anyone expects —
Long after the darkness has descended —
and all the bridesmaids fall asleep.

When he arrives,
some are ready, even if they're sleepy —
but some are not ready.
Some, foolishly, didn't prepare.
They didn't prepare for the
already-but-not-yet party
by living and acting and
participating as if it's already here.
They aren't fully invested,
and they don't have what they need.

It will help for us to understand
what the word foolish
meant in a 1st century,
wisdom tradition context.
It's not like forgetful or unintelligent or lazy —
as we might imagine.
It's more like
those who are nonchalant,

who don't take things seriously,
who procrastinate —
like wisdom isn't really worth the effort.
Justice and righteousness
aren't really worth the effort
in the here and now. Right?
After all, Christ will come again
and make everything ok for everybody.
Right?
Except for this wedding party,
this moment of the Lord,
happens in the dark of night
and half of those who wait
have no light.

Jesus makes it clear
that our participation in the
already-but-not-yet kingdom of heaven
really matters even now,
as we wait.
It's very much part of the ancient tradition
that humankind is called by God
to participate in *tikun olam* —
the healing of the universe.
It's our "sacred charge to join our energy
with the energy of the Holy One
in an effort to restore the broken cosmos
to wholeness."[1]
Justice and righteousness
right now
are worth the effort,
because the consequences for our not participating
are that the poor suffer.
The meek are ignored.
Those who mourn aren't comforted.
The hungry remain unfed.
And those who are sick
can't access medical care.

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[1] Mirabai Starr, *God of Love,* p. 28

Our participation *absolutely does* matter,
even while we're still trying to figure out
what Christ coming again will be like.

That hasn't changed in more than 2000 years!
Paul wrote his letter to the church in Thessalonika
only about 10 years after the Jesus event.
They were just beginning to
try to figure out what it all meant
and what this coming again
is all about.
Paul describes it like the cultural practice
of that time
of citizens going out from the city
to greet a visiting dignitary
or a returning soldier who has
conquered an enemy.
They escort them in with celebration.
In this *tikun olam*,
Christ comes again as one
who has conquered death,
and the dead are the first ones
to greet Christ's return.

So let's put all this together.
Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.
We place our trust in
Christ's past faithfulness
even to death on the cross.
We hold on to the hope
of Christ's resurrection
and triumph over death.
And we live into the promise
of Christ's return
by living as if it's already here.

We don't need to be careful what we wish for!
We just need to *live* what we wish for
and trust that it will come

no matter how long the arc
of the moral universe is,
it *will* bend toward justice
toward healing for the cosmos.
We live that trust
not as a passive guarantee,
but as a call
for unfaltering moral and political action.
And we are here to help it bend.