

## 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - Matthew 25:1-13

A tour group had ridden elevators to the top of the Empire State Building. At about the 102nd floor, a woman asked the tour guide, “If the cables on this elevator break, do we go up or down?” The tour guide answered, “Well, that depends on how you are living.”

There’s an unexpected word in today’s gospel. But it is a word of power. It is also a word of the Kingdom. That word is “**NO**”. When all the bridesmaids get up and begin to trim their lamps, the foolish say to the wise, “give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out”. The wise respond, “**NO**”.

Now that’s rather shocking. After all, this is a parable of Jesus. This is a parable that gives to us a description of God’s kingdom. Wouldn’t you expect that the wise bridesmaids would be a bit more generous, sharing what they have with those in need? How do they get away with saying “**NO**”?

The wise bridesmaids can say “no” because it is an appropriate response in the circumstances in which they find themselves. Moreover, “no” is a valid response in the kingdom of God.

You see it is essential to understand that in this parable the ten bridesmaids know one another. The wise bridesmaids know that the other five are foolish. They know that the foolish bridesmaids are habitually negligent. They share a history with one another.

Time and time again the wise found themselves used by the foolish bridesmaids. They share a history where frequently the wise had to bail the foolish out. So, over a period of time it became clear to the **wise** bridesmaids that giving the foolish ones what they asked for was not helping them. It was only enabling their deficiencies and negligence.

That is why the wise have the right to refuse the request. That is why it is valid for them to say “**NO**”.

Now don't get me wrong. “Yes” is at the very heart of the Gospel. Giving of ourselves to others is what makes us true disciples of Jesus. Laying down our life for one another is the very crux of salvation.

But it is precisely because giving and sacrificing are at the heart of the gospel that this parable today is so important. Because what this parable calls us to is wisdom, a wisdom to discern one thing from another.

There is a difference between a “yes” that helps and a “yes” that harms. There is a difference between a sacrifice that is redemptive and a sacrifice that is destructive. There is a difference between a “no” said out of selfishness and a “no” spoken out of wisdom.

To be a follower of Jesus we are called to give of ourselves, but we are not expected to give ourselves into the hands of those who would hurt us and abuse us.

We are called then to recognize that there are foolish people in the world, people who will take advantage of us and hurt us. If we are wise, we will figure out who those people are.

If we are wise, we will realize that we have a right and responsibility to protect ourselves from harm. God has made us and made us valuable. We have the responsibility to protect ourselves, to preserve our future, to ensure our joy.

So, if you find yourself in a situation where you are being abused physically, verbally, mentally, don't think that it is holiness in putting up with that mistreatment. You are a person of value, and the gospel calls you to say “no”- to say “no” to your spouse, to your parent, to your employer, to your priest.

If you find yourself in a relationship where you are being manipulated to do things that are not healthy for you or for others, where you are spoken to in a way that destroys your self-worth, don't think that you are following the example of Jesus by suffering these things in silence. You are a person of value, and you have every right and responsibility to say, "this must stop".

If someone has lied to you habitually, continually promised you one thing and delivered another, you are not doing something laudatory by believing that person yet one more time.

You have every right and responsibility to say, "Your word is no longer good with me. I will not put my life in your hands again."

The sad truth is, there are people in this world who are foolish, selfish, and manipulative. The gospel calls us to love them; but it does not advise us to believe them.

Jesus asks us to forgive them; but he warns us not to trust them. The parable today calls us to wisdom. A wisdom that can discern when giving of ourselves is praiseworthy and when it is a waste of our time.

We are called to be wise persons, people who look at our experience and use our heads. A wise person will know when giving and sacrificing are warranted and when the only response which is right and holy is to say simply, "**NO**".