

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Wisdom 6:12-16; 1Thessalonians 4:13-18; and Matthew 25:1-13

We are waiting, anxiously waiting. As I write, the nation awaits the results of an election in which the moral character of our country is at stake; perhaps you, days later, are still waiting. We wait to end the pandemic and we are antsy, weary, inching toward the way we used to live and calculating the risks. We wait for an end to racism and we are disgusted at how long it takes to extricate this multi-tentacled evil from our hearts. We wait impatiently in traffic and yell at other drivers. We wait to be called to work, wait for our ship to come in, our voice to be heard, wait for a hero or a win. We wait, exhausted.

When I was a volunteer with formerly homeless, mentally ill women, I accompanied one of the women to the WillsEye Hospital, which offered treatment for the poor one day a week. We waited in a huge hall with scores of others, everyone seated in rows, first come, first served. We all waited for hours. Yet, no one complained. No one checked their watches, glared or puffed impatiently. No one tried to jump the line. They accepted that waiting was part of life. I marveled.

Is there wisdom here for the rest of us? Wisdom, after all, is about knowing who we are, where to place our energies and what to value. The people waiting patiently at WillsEye Hospital knew that they were being given a gift. They knew what the real struggles of life were. They were not hindered by self-importance. They understood what the first six chapters of Wisdom want us to know: "the world is ultimately ruled by the Spirit and Wisdom of God... There is... operative in the world a hidden authority [which] becomes visible, especially when a 'child (or servant) of God' trusts completely in God."¹

Wis 6:12-16 tell us God is waiting for us to reach this place of trust, i.e. viewing the world as God does - - with Wisdom. Wisdom accompanies God at all times and is one with God. (Many Christian theologians see Wisdom as a precursor to the Holy Spirit.) Her eagerness to share God's perspective matches ours: "Whoever watches for her at dawn shall not be disappointed, for they shall find her sitting by their gate." In fact, it precedes ours: "She makes her own rounds, seeking those worthy of her." Whatever path we are on, Wisdom is already nearby, making "herself known in anticipation of [our] desire."

Wisdom also infuses 1Thessalonians with a sense of hopeful assurance. Paul's generation worried that Christians who had died would miss out on being raised from the dead at Jesus' second coming. Paul tells them, "[I]f we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep." Christ's death and resurrection have created a new fabric for life, a fabric we all exist in, whether dead or alive. No one is left out of God's blessings; no one is lost.

If God's power and wisdom permeate the world, why are our lives still filled with anxious waiting? Could it be that we need to accept waiting as our reality – as the patient patients at the WillsEye Hospital do – instead of wishing away the waiting or chafing at the bit to move beyond it? Wisdom helps us expect only good things, like reunions with those we love, health, growth, freedom and love.

What's more, Wisdom inspires us to live those things now as we wait; that is what Jesus encourages in the parable of the ten bridesmaids. While we do not know a lot about wedding customs in first century Palestine, we all have experience with reasonable weddings – in Greek *phronimoi* can mean prudent as well as wise – and with foolish ones (to put it diplomatically). The lamps here call to mind Mt 6:21, when Jesus told us to be a light for all to see. Are we flickering lights or a steady beacon? When the foolish bridesmaids hammer on the locked door, the groom calls out, "I do not know you." The verb *oida* means a knowledge based on doing things together. We must do what is wise as God does. As a friend said after a recent Sunday worship service turned into a super-spreader event, "God is in charge and we should pray hard, but we have to do the right things." That means following CDC guidelines to keep people alive. It means making efforts to be civil to everyone. It means learning about racism to stop perpetuating it. It means wise decisions that reflect God's mercy. Wisdom is waiting for us. Let her in!

- ❖ Is the patience of the poor people at the WillsEye Hospital worth imitating?
- ❖ Give your exhaustion from waiting to God. Then figure out what acts of mercy you need to do.

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¹ Clifford, Richard J. "Wisdom," Paulist Biblical Commentary, Paulist Press, 2018, p. 565.