THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



November 8, 2026

IN THE DARK

reading the parables lightly

by Drew Downs

For the next three weeks, the lectionary has us digging into the darkest sequence in the gospel of Matthew. Jesus has condemned the authorities and predicted destruction and then tells a series of parables about separation. None of this is easy to work with and the temptation may be to pretend its easy; as if the parables themselves are simple teachings for all times, rather than contextually rich and challenging stories in themselves.

Recognizing that parables have multiple ways in, to read them like an onion, with many layers, means that we can choose to peel back and keep learning from them. This requires a lighter touch, doesn't it? To peel each away, carefully and thoughtfully. But it also lightens the nature of these dark, confounding parables, helping us make sense of their internal conflicts, their implications, and what they might mean for all of those who hear Jesus's words, then and now.

ORDINARY TIME

2026

WHAT'S GOING ON

"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today". -Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Convention This Week

Our diocese gathers for its annual convention this week; a gathering of clergy and laity, representing ministries from all over central and southern Indiana, reflecting their communities in service and Christian hope.

How we gather as church reflects what we believe, how we see each other, and how we hope to embody the *Missio Dei*, the Mission of God. So we don't just go and do some business—we pray and discern and gather in fellowship and formation. And these elements are central to what we do and how we gather.

This, friends, is the most radical part of being church. And its often the hardest part to do. Because we're used to the logic of problem-solving or the swiftness of corporate meetings or the efficient delegating of tasks and slowing down just long enough for a perfunctory prayer, giving our time a churchy gloss seems like enough. Or if the people gathered are Christian, then the gathering becomes Christian—even if we're the Pentagon or a high school football team.

It is important for us to take seriously our formation as people of faith who dwell in scripture and the world, who pray together and discern a path forward that reflects, not just our values, but our mission of service and restoration.

One of the ways I've often described it is this: when Christians get together, we should look like it—because we embody The Way of Love in our gathering, in our being, in who we are together. And we do that best when we take the time to be this together, because joyful and intentional fellowship is sacramental.

With love,
Drew+

ORDINARY TIME

2026

FOR SUNDAY

Proper 27A

November 8, 2026

Collect

O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Reading *Matthew 25:1-13*

Jesus said, "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

Reflection

This is just one of several parables in chapter 25 that I call “the dark parables”; a collection of difficult parables with a dark implication of God. But, given the context, we can see that they reflect a more complex teaching, and therefore something we should treat carefully.

Two weeks ago we were wrapping up chapter 22, when Jesus was being confronted by the Temple leadership. In the next chapters, Jesus tears into the leadership and predicts dark times to come, culminating in the desecration of the Temple by Rome. The whole sequence is intense, perhaps even terrifying. It isn’t the response we have come to expect from Jesus, it is fair to say. And yet, it is also precisely necessary to wrap our heads around a parable of urgency, of bridesmaids and lamp oil, and of being left out in the cold.

Jesus sets up two groups of bridesmaids who are anticipating the coming of the bridegroom: the ones actively preparing for it and the ones who aren’t. The preparation itself is certainly key to the teaching, but so is that sense of urgency. That it could be at any time.

Modern readers are likely to remove this from its context, however, and make this about living our lives more *traditionally*, perhaps, or with greater intention. But this ignores both the connotation of the parable in its context and its dark vision of God *when removed from that context*.

It isn’t foolishness that is being condemned, but the Temple authorities who aren’t preparing for God’s Dream to be fulfilled; those who are relying on Roman power to maintain their authority. Without understanding the small cohort of people Jesus condemns, we might get our sense of scale out of proportion. This isn’t about general foolishness (or disability), but those in a regime and who support a regime of unfaithfulness to God.

That's the context. Where we go with that next is on us.