

Short game / Long game. How do you live your life?

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Grace Church In Scarborough

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There is a rule about Jewish Parables from the time of Jesus. It says that each parable has only one point. What is the point of the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids? I think it is about how far ahead you are thinking. That is what distinguishes the two groups. One was thinking about just enough for now, and the wise ones were thinking about a longer possible window of time.

If that is right then what is Jesus trying to teach us with this story? How do you operate? Short term or long range? The sports term is, I think, the short game or the long game.

When I was about 10 years old I learned to ride a bike. Some older kids on my street got me up on a bike way too big for me. They ran along holding me and then let go when I was going. I was so terrified of falling that I stayed upright until one could catch me. Then I rode again on a smaller bike. At first I couldn't look beyond the front wheel. If I watched it I could balance, but to glance up was too risky. Needless to say I crashed into the back of a parked car. To ride well you have to look ahead. Now I am getting ready to do the M2 motor bike test. The book says you should be looking way ahead and spotting all the dangers and difficulties long before you come to them.

It is the same raising children. You have to pay attention to what is happening right now. But you also need to be thinking about where you hope they will be heading in the years to come. The way you approach education, or hockey, or family values is all about playing the long game, not just this round. You are thinking of the adult you are trying to help them become

So how does this Gospel teaching affect our lives now?

I think when you look at how you live your life, as an individual man or woman, it has to do with extending your horizons. Jesus says set your compass direction for life, not just for a day or a week. That means when someone asks you what your aim in life is it will not be something like, "Oh, I just want to make it Friday and have few beers!"

A long view answer might be, "I want my family to know that I will never stop loving them." Or it could be "I want to know that I can always look backwards and never feel ashamed of anything I've done." On Wednesday at the Eucharist one of the folks said that her mother had told her to live each day with kindness to others and thankfulness in her heart. (or words along that line). You might say "I want to have Jesus as my model of living in every decision I make." That is a specifically Christian compass setting.

You get the idea of long range life directions?

What about us as a church community here in Grace Church?

I think the first thing here is to ask yourself where you stand in the church community. It is early days yet. We are at week 5. Not long for a church.

I think a good way to find out where you are with Grace is to look at that way you talk about this church. Do you say, "Oh at Church they are doing this ..." or do you say "Oh at Church we are doing this ..."? That will tell you whether you are a fellow traveler with the church or an actual member of Grace.

So first long game question is about "Are you just hanging in for the moment, seeing how it goes, before you make a decision?" or are you saying, "This is a journey I've signed up for with God?" I guess that is a choice between enough oil for now, or enough oil for the long haul.

This is a little of what is going on in the Joshua story. Joshua, who has succeeded Moses as the leader of the Israelites, is about to launch the whole group into the land of promise. He is basically asking folks whether they are in for the "whole meal deal" with this God, "the Lord" or not. Joshua says "If you are coming on this trip you need to think of the long game. Plenty of oil."

I cannot stand up and be quite so decisive, and threatening, as Joshua about Grace Church. But I know that the leadership of this church will emerge from the people who see a vision of a church which has a journey to make and a future to discover. People who can, as it were, live with a compass setting rather than a blue print. People who can let go of what was in the past in order to have open hands to receive the thing God has yet to show us.

For me personally, this Gospel is a word from the Lord, now, at this time in my life, in this place of ministry, that says, "David. I need your commitment. I need you to go along with me in this new church, without knowing how it is going to turn out. I need you to be ready and with enough energy, imagination and willingness to ride out the tough times. I need you in for the long game. Are you up for this?" I know that for the last months, and still, my answer to God is "Yes! I'm in."

For you the question may be the same. Or....it may be about your marriage. It may be about your grandchildren. It may be about your prayer life or any other number of things I cannot begin to imagine.

There is one point to a parable, and usually no more than one point in my sermons. Each of you is unique, and the Lord, in this time of praise, teaching and worship is speaking to you directly. He has a word for each one of you today and it is hidden in the intimacy of his deep knowledge of you and his profound love for you. It is personal and for your heart. So, however it is set in your life, my invitation to you is to wonder how God is calling you to the long game that matters. Don't get shut out because you didn't pay attention. Be welcomed in to the celebration of love that God lays out before you. Be the one to whom he says, "Come in to the banquet."

So, "Keep awake, for we do not know the day or the hour." Make every choice as one in the long game.