Sermon Note: Waiting Up
Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Introduction
This Sunday in worship, we'll hear Jesus' parable of ten bridesmaids waiting for a groom. Some are prepared and some aren't. As we wait, God calls us to be attentive to our neighbors and to the people we love, and waiting isn't easy when we don't know what will happen next. Jesus tells this parable near the end of his ministry, reminding us to be prepared and remain present to God and our neighbors while we wait.

Illustration Video
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDS0na-D3FI
In this clip from *Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey* (1993), a family separated from their pets hears something both unexpected and familiar…

Why This Video?
The Burnford-Seaver family has been separated from Chance, Sassy, and Shadow, and the whole family welcomes each of them home in turn. Chance says friendship and love are "more than just the mushy stuff" after being welcomed by people who care about him. When we wait for those we love (or for anything else we might hope for), we can wait with patience and care for one another.

Video Discussion Questions
1. When have you waited for someone you love? What do you remember about seeing that person again?
2. Young Jamie hears a bark before Chance finally appears. What can we notice about the whole family's response to that bark? What about that appearance?
3. After Chance and Sassy arrive, Jamie's brother Peter says Shadow was old and the journey was too far. What do you think Peter is thinking and feeling in that moment?
4. Shadow appears limping and keeps moving. What do you notice about Shadow and Peter's reunion? How do their words to each other help us understand their relationship?
5. Chance says Shadow's belief helped them through the journey. What do you think Chance means? When has someone else's confidence helped you through uncertainty?
6. As the Burnford-Seaver family goes inside, Chance says he has a family and has found a home. What do you think he's learned about connection and belonging? How can our church show that kind of care to those who need it?

Matthew 25:1-13 (CEB)
[1]"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten young bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom. [2]Now five of them were wise, and the other five were foolish. [3]The foolish ones took their lamps but didn't bring oil for them. [4]But the wise ones took their lamps and also brought containers of oil.

[5]"When the groom was late in coming, they all became drowsy and went to sleep. [6]But at midnight there was a cry, 'Look, the groom! Come out to meet him.'

[7]"Then all those bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps. [8]But the foolish bridesmaids said to the wise ones, 'Give us some of your oil, because our lamps have gone out.'

[9]"But the wise bridesmaids replied, 'No, because if we share with you, there won't be enough for our lamps and yours. We have a better idea. You go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' [10]But while they were gone to buy oil, the groom came. Those who were ready went with him into the wedding. Then the door was shut.

[11]"Later the other bridesmaids came and said, 'Lord, lord, open the door for us.'

[12]"But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

[13]"Therefore, keep alert, because you don't know the day or the hour.

Scripture Study Questions

1. What are your first impressions of this parable? Which interpretations may make you uncomfortable or seem confusing?
2. What could each of these symbolize: the wise bridesmaids, the foolish bridesmaids, the oil, the groom, the wedding, the door?
3. The groom arrives later than expected, and both the wise and foolish bridesmaids have fallen asleep (v5). How does that detail affect the way you understand the differences between them?
4. When the five ask for oil, the others say there won't be enough to share (v8-9). What do you think about that response? What does it suggest about what it means to be prepared?
5. Jesus concludes, "keep alert, because you don't know the day or the hour" (v13). What are your thoughts or questions about Jesus' return? Is there an emotion connected to that for you?
6. What do you think it means in your own life to "keep alert" for Jesus' return? How "awake" to the things of God do you feel in this season of your life?
7. What if this parable is a call to be present, to pay attention to what is happening around you and within you, and to listen to people who want to tell you their stories? What resonates with you about that idea? What challenges you?

Weekly Action

Think of someone who is waiting right now. Maybe they're waiting for a test result, waiting to heal, or waiting to hear from someone they love. Ask God to help you imagine what that waiting is like for them. Then make a plan to keep them company: call, visit, or share a meal, and listen to whatever they want to say, or just *be* with them in quiet. Later, talk with a trusted spiritual partner about what stood out to you in that experience, and consider how you might continue to be present for that person.

Prayer

Patient and loving God, we confess that we may be asleep to your presence in some parts of our lives. Will you wake us up where we are asleep to your presence? And where we are awake, will you continue to stir us into active waiting on your return? Where we have questions, will you meet us, assuring us of your patient love, that we might be filled with your love and grow in patience. In Christ's name, whose return we await, we pray. Amen.

This content was developed by Rev. Bob Rhodes using source materials from Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church, his own original writing, and AI tools in alignment with La Jolla UMC AI Usage Guidelines. AI assisted with drafting and iterative refinement. All final text was reviewed and approved by Rev. Rhodes.