

Cornel Barnett
Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
April 29, 2012
Scout Sunday

Matthew 25:1-13
"Be Prepared"

The Gospel reading is Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus said:

"The kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'

⁷Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹But 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.'

¹⁰And 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. ¹¹Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹²But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.'

¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

For as long as I can remember the phrase "Be Prepared" has been a scout motto. You must think I chose the obvious for my sermon title. To be honest, it was suggested on the Boy Scouts website and it came with a story.

I will tell their story and then I shall tell one of my own to press home the importance of being prepared. The story in the gospel lesson which was also suggested by the Boy Scouts website makes the same point: Be prepared.

Here's the Boy Scouts web story. It begins:

Though the winter air was crisp, an early sun warmed our faces as we prepared to start a twenty-mile hike.

We were properly dressed for the weather. We had our boots laced tightly to protect our feet from the cold water in the streams we knew we would have to ford. Our packs held our lunch, rain gear, dry socks, and first-aid supplies.

We were prepared.

However, the sun soon faded from view as unexpected storm clouds covered the sky. Soon it was raining and our pace was slowed. The water in the streams was now too deep to ford, so we lost time finding better crossings. The rain changed to driving snow, and our footing became treacherous. We were losing time, and the day was slipping away.

The storm passed, but now it was getting dark and we still had several miles to go. It was at this point that we realized we were not prepared—we had no flashlights in our packs, not one. We stumbled along in the dark and finally, with great difficulty, finished the hike.

Some of the best training we receive comes as a result of our own mistakes, failures, omission—not being prepared. If this is true, why must humankind persist in making the same mistakes over and over?

This is my story:

My friend Dave Hayter and I made preparations for our three-day hike on top of the Drakensberg Mountains in South Africa. The Zulus call the mountains the “Barrier of Spears” because of the jagged edges of the rugged mountains. They are like spears pointing heavenward.

It was winter but we did not expect bad weather or snow. It wasn’t in the forecast. We packed warm clothing but did not include a wind-breaker. Bad decision!

We began our hike at 8,000 feet and walked another 5,000 feet close to the top of Giant’s Mountain. Night fell and we slept in our sleeping bags in a crag in the side of the mountain. We were exhausted and fell asleep quite comfortably.

In the middle of the night the wind turned and instead of blowing over us it now blew in almost gale force speed directly into us. In short order, I froze. I put on every piece of clothing and still froze. I wish I had a wind-breaker.

Finally, Dave came over and placed his sleeping bag next to mine and we slept together like peas in a pod. It was a brilliant move and I was grateful for the warmth of his closeness. It saved our lives.

The next night we pitched our tent on the escarpment which happens to be in the country of Lesotho. We ate our meal cooked on a little cooker and before I zipped the tent I looked out on the beautiful green hills.

I was so exhausted that I fell asleep instantly and slept through the night. When I woke at daylight, the top of the tent had sagged in and was about a foot from my face. I zipped open the tent and the green world of the night before was totally white. It had snowed overnight and I never heard or felt a thing. That's a heavy sleep!

It was super, super cold. We took down the tent and I walked around the square where the tent had been to keep warm. We then trudged through the snow and the water-proofing on my boots wasn't adequate to keep out the water from the melting snow. I could have bought water-proof hiking boots.

We survived the trip and it was absolutely magnificent but I wish I was more prepared.

God has given us wonderful abilities to figure things out, to plan and be prepared. I work on these things every day and I know the scouts present are being taught this over and over and as result you are being prepared for life.

God bless you and all of us in our preparations and in our many hikes through life. Amen.