



Listening for Hope Matthew 25:1-13 Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (November 12, 2023)

There is no simple reaction or response to the terrifying stories that we've been watching regarding the war between Israel and Hamas. There are no easy answers to the questions we have about such a complex past and present situation.

What is certain, though, is the pain and grief that accompany so much death and devastation. While it may be difficult to fully understand the who, what, when, where, how, and why of this war, it is necessary to condemn hatred and violence when we see it. We cry out with lament for those who have lost their lives, their livelihoods, their homes, their families, and their futures.

War is polarizing. Folks feel as though they must make instinctual choices to back one side or the other. We're tempted to choose a "good guy" and a "bad guy". But when it comes down to it, the evils of war are indiscriminate.

When we are faced with difficult news in our societies, especially if it generates discord, it is helpful to listen. Perhaps it is easier to demonize some and distance ourselves from what is going on. But listening to real stories from real people, who are directly impacted by what's going on, creates empathy and enables us to respond in a meaningful way. What has happened in their lives? How are they feeling? What are they afraid of? Do they have any hope?

Listening leads us to better understand the causes and consequences of conflict. And opening one's ears before opening one's mouth allows us to focus primarily on the humanity of those involved and the ways that we can go about healing the wounds of war.

The gospel for this week includes a parable. Jesus' teachings often come in the form of a parable. At the end of the parable one might easily feel inclined to judge the unwise bridesmaid and dismiss their lack of preparation as inconsideration. But that's a warning to all of us.

The story does conjure up some fears and anxieties. How would you feel if you missed out on a long-anticipated wedding banquet and were left outside? Some of the feelings the bridesmaids express in this story are exhaustion and anxiety.

Have you felt exhausted recently? Maybe from all of the things on your to-do list. Perhaps from all of the things you've been hearing and reading in the news. Maybe from a grief experience, a newly broken relationship or an overwhelming medical procedure.

The messages we like to hear in our communities of faith are those sprinkled with hope and love. However, our daily experiences in the life of faith might be different and can make us feel disoriented, hopeless and lonely. We, like the ten bridesmaids in this story, find ourselves

overwhelmed by exhaustion and anxiety. Our eyes get droopy as we search for glimpses and signs of God's hope and love in our lives and may feel anxious about missing opportunities.

This parable does not necessarily leave us with a happy ending. It sounds rather as a warning: you have been called into a privileged relationship, a bridesmaid at a wedding feast, an insider, a person of importance...with certain qualities. How easy it is to take things for granted, people for granted, relationships for granted. How do we stay attentive, so we don't miss opportunities?

May the Good Lord have mercy on us and bless us with forgiveness and strength to acknowledge mistakes and grow in the appreciation of our calling and our relationships. Amen.