

We Do Not Know the Day...

Matthew 25: 1-13

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In Honor and in Memory of The Rev. Linda A. Packard

May the God who creates us...

Good Morning!

As I wrote this I was sitting next to my dear friend,  
the Rev. Linda Packard. For three days I had been  
sitting next to the side of the bed of my dear friend  
Linda Packard, as she breathes in and out. Her  
breaths are rapid and consistent, in and out. I was  
there sitting next to and sometimes on her bed in

Galena, IL, because her daughter Kate called me this past Tuesday night and said, “Mom is going into hospice, and we aren’t sure how long she will last.” I finished the Commission on Ministry meeting I was attending, helped clean up and got in my car to drive back home from Brighton. I called Linda as I drove home in the dark, on rte 96, past more than one dear carcass. She picked up my call right away.

“Hey,” she said, sounding every bit like herself.

“Hey,” I said, “So, hospice...”

“Yes. It’s very weird.

“Tell me...” I said.

“It’s odd...” and she trailed off.

She and I had talked about her dying when we’d been on retreat together two months ago. She’d asked me to do her memorial service. I agreed.

“Linda,” I said, “I love you soooo much. You are so important to me.”

“Yes, my friend and you are sooo important to me,” she replied.

“I’m coming Linda, I’ll be there soon.”

“Oh, Bonnie, that will be wonderful.”

The next morning her daughter texted me and said, she had had a difficult night and was declining. I texted back, “I’m leaving now.”

I hopped in the car and made the drive that many of us have made, hoping to get to my friend in time, while she was still alive.

Seven hours later I walked in and kissed her. She smiled wide—and said, “You came.”

Those are pretty much the last words Linda said to me. Her attention turned inward, sleeping mostly, medicated to contain the sharp pain of her leukemia.

Her family is all around her. So amazing, so  
attentive: Keeping watch, holding her hand,  
reading Mary Oliver poetry.

When I looked at the Gospel passage for this week,  
it took my breath away. The author of Matthew's  
Gospel writes,

*“Keep awake, for we do not know either the day  
or the hour, when our Lord is coming.”*

We do not know the day or the hour...

Right before the family and I gathered to read the “Litany at the Time of Death”, I got a text from a former parishioner, and dear friend, a young man I met when he was 8. Patrick was texting to tell me that he and his wife, whom I’d had the honor of marrying, had just had a little baby girl, Noelle. I doubled over sobbing. Death and life, beginning and ending, intertwining, all of that which matters so much in our lives.

Keep awake, for we do not know the day or the hour. Some of the bride's maids were prepared, and some were caught unaware; Not enough oil in their lamps, no light to guide their path to the approaching bridegroom. They needed to turn back and go buy more oil. The bridegroom came, the bridesmaids with oil followed him into the wedding hall for the banquet. The bridesmaid's



without oil missed the open doors to the banquet hall.

While I do not see this parable as a story of some of us being left out of God's kingdom, I do think it is a super interesting warning of sorts. A reminder that some of us, find ourselves so myopically involved with the frustrating details, the petty grievances, the annoyances of our day to day lives that we fail to remember what matters most. This

week, as I moved my scheduled around, juggling appointments and commitments to be with my friend Linda in her last days, I understood again what theologian Howard Thurman calls, “*the sound of the genuine.*” He goes on to say,

*“The sound of the genuine is flowing through you. Don’t be deceived and thrown off by all the noises that are a part of even your dreams and ambitions, so that you don’t hear the sound of the*

*genuine in you, because that is the only true guide*

*that you will ever have, and if you don't have*

*that you don't have a thing."*

I, and perhaps you as well, I can get stuck on the

small things and miss what matters most. We fixate

on the extraneous and our lamps burn low. We

overlook the essentials, and focus on the stupid

and miss what matters. Friends, this week, as the

days get shorter and the nights grow longer, I

invite you to narrow your focus to what matters most. “For we do not know the day or the hour, when the Lord is coming.”

My friend Linda, knew the sound of the genuine.

She lived it day in and day out. She died Friday

afternoon, while her family and I prayed Compline

around her bed. She took her last breath as I began

with these words, “*The Lord Almighty grant us a*

*peaceful night and a perfect end.*” (BCP p 127)

May we know what matters dear ones. For we do  
not know the day or the hour.

Amen.

Linda has a deep abiding love of Mary Oliver's poetry, she had this poem taped to her bathroom wall.

*When Death Comes* by Mary Oliver

*When death comes*

*like a hungry bear in autumn;*

*when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse*

*To buy me, and snaps the purse shut;*

*When death comes...*

*Like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,*

*I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering:*

*What is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness? ...*

*When it's over, I want to say: all my life*

*I was a bride married to amazement.*

*I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.*

*When it's over, I don't want to wonder  
If I have made of my life something particular, and real.  
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,  
Or full of argument.*

*I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.*

May we know what matters dear ones. For we do not know the day or the hour.  
Amen.