

A young man name Tom enters a very strict monastery. On his first day the abbot says, "Tom, you will only be able to speak two words every five years." Tom agreed and entered into silence. Five years later the abbot calls him into his office. Brother, you have done well in your first five years. What would you like to say? The monk says, "Bad food". The abbot replied, "I'm sorry to hear that." Five years later the monk is called into the abbot office and ask what he would like to say. He said, "Hard bed". The Abbot said, "I'm sorry to hear that." Then after another five years the two meet and the Abbot says, what two words would you like to say? Tom replied, "I quit". The abbot says, "It's about time, that all you've done is complain since you arrived here."

Jesus told his disciples this parable: "The kingdom of heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps. Since the bridegroom was long delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight, there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise ones replied, 'No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.' While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked. Afterwards the other bridesmaids came and said, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!' But he said in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.' Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

One of my favorite reflections is called, "What will Matter".

**R**eady or not, some day it will all come to an end. There will be no more no minutes, hours or days. All the things you collected, whether treasured or forgotten will pass to someone else. Your wealth, fame and power will be unimportant. It will not matter what you owned or what you were owed. Your grudges, resentments, frustrations and jealousies will finally disappear. So too, your hopes, ambitions, plans and to-do lists will expire. The wins and losses that once seemed so important will fade away. It won't matter where you came from or what side of the tracks you lived on at the end. It won't matter whether you were beautiful or brilliant. Even your gender and skin color will be irrelevant.

**S**o, what will matter? How will the value of your days be measured? What will matter is not what you bought but what you built, not what you got but what you gave. What will matter is not your success but your significance. What will matter is not what you learned but what you taught. What will matter is every act of integrity, compassion, courage, or sacrifice that enriched, empowered or encouraged others to imitate your example.

What will matter is not your competence but your character. Living a life that matters doesn't happen by accident. It's not a matter of circumstance but of choice. Choose to live a life that matters.

Jesus concludes His parable by saying, “Be prepared, stay awake for you do not know the day or the hour.” After reflecting on these words, for me to be prepared for Christ means striving to live a life that matters.

While in Seminary training, I participated in a weekend retreat which helped me to let go of some things that don’t matter and to embrace those things that do. The retreat was called “What’s in your backpack”.

At the beginning of the retreat, the presenter gave each of us small backpack and sheets of paper. We were instructed to write down the things that we carry around with us. Not physical things but spiritual, emotional stuff, attitudes, beliefs, which we hold in our hearts and minds. Things like faith, friends, families, worries, regrets, hurtful views of ourselves or others.

Since faith is a huge part of my life, I wrote down “faith in Christ” and put it in my back pack. Since I worried about not doing enough, I wrote that “worry” down on a sheet of paper and put it in my pack.

By the time I was finished, I had 25 pieces of paper in my back pack, each piece representing something that is a part of me.

We were then told to carry that backpack where ever we went throughout the day, even at pray and meals.

The next morning, we were instructed to empty our packs on a separate table and spread out our sheet of paper. We were asked to reflect on each one of the things on the sheets and to ask ourselves the questions, “why and how did we come about carrying these things?”

After this period of reflection, we were asked to put back into our packs only the stuff we really want to continue to carry; I made

sure I put back in my pack, good friends, a sense of humor, zest for life, faith in Christ. Then we were invited to discard those things on the sheets that don't matter, that are weighing us down. I discarded two attitudes "the desire to fix others and the need to hurry up and do more." I had been carrying those two attitudes around with me for a long time, they were only weighing me down.

Then the presenter invited us to think about things we would like to add to our life which we haven't been carrying. I decided to put in, "Live in the present moment", on another sheet I wrote, "be yourself, everyone else is taken", finally I put in, "listen intently to understand others."

A couple of days after the retreat, Jim, a Seminary friend of mine said, "I feel so free only to be carrying around with me those things that matter."

Today's parable, as well as many of Jesus' teachings, tell us not to get caught off guard, be prepared, to be ready for we do not know the day or the hour.

Take some time this week and do your own backpack exercise. Write down those things in your life that really matter and rejoice in them. Then write down those things which are weighing you down and ask Jesus to free you from them.

Let us pray: please pray after me, "Lord Jesus, you know all of the stuff which I carry around with me, you know the things which weigh me down and the things which lift me up. Lord give me the grace to free myself of those unnecessary things and to embrace those things that matter, so I may better move along as your disciple."