

# Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Date: March 29, 2020  
Sermon Title: "Wise or Foolish"  
Scripture: Mark 6:31-44  
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe

## Mark 6:31-44

*He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.' But he answered them, 'You give them something to eat.' They said to him, 'Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?' And he said to them, 'How many loaves have you? Go and see.' When they had found out, they said, 'Five, and two fish.' Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.*

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In a planning meeting I once attended, a "holier than thou" skeptic told us to can the planning, just trust God. The chair, a distinguished Bible scholar, said, "Planning doesn't show lack of faith. You plan because you do have faith."

In the final week of Jesus's life, we see clearly how he was thinking ahead. It's crystal clear Jesus had planned out Palm Sunday and the Lord's Supper. Preparation, arrangement, details had all been taken care of. That's the theme of my little sermon for today: Preparation. Planning.

You've heard the saying, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" or "A leopard doesn't change its spots," clichés about stubborn resistance to change, and they're not true! We are all learning new tricks. Virtual exercise. Online learning. Zoom meetings. Live streaming. Curbside pickup. Patience. No sports. We are all learning new tricks or dusting off old ones.

Alida has dragged me into the 20th century, even dipping my toes in the 21st century. She made me, yes, *made me* videotape a Bible Study using my iPhone, made it into a YouTube video with a live Zoom feedback session on Monday.

The good news is that our Church was prepared in lots of ways for this new reality. Thanks to an excellent Communications Board and some tireless volunteers, Alida's emphasis, and staff willingness, we were using technology, buying equipment, upgrading, rethinking—all that stuff ahead of time.

The bottom line of a lot of Bible stories is being prepared, planning ahead. Jesus's Parable of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids is incredibly simple. Five bridesmaids, the wise ones, conserve the oil in their oil lamps, so when the bridegroom arrives late at night, they are ready to light the way. The five foolish bridesmaids, they stay up all night partying, so when the bridegroom arrives, they're out of oil. And they're left in the dark.

Did you know there's a whole book in the Bible called "Numbers"? It's called "Numbers" because when the Israelites escaped slavery in Egypt, one of their first big jobs was a census: take stock, count heads, number everybody, so they could get organized.

I'm not an organized, be-prepared, planner kind of guy. Since moving here, I have endured 50 power outages, ranging from a few hours to a couple of days. My neighbors, they also had power outages lasting five, sometimes 10 minutes. What's the difference between my neighbors and me? I'm an idiot, and they're not. They prepare; I don't. I sit in the dark, literally cursing the darkness, literally lighting a candle, while they are bathed in electricity! Because after their first power outage, they bought a generator. Me, I bought a pizza.

Truthfully, after each of those 50 power outages, I just forgot about it. The heck with it; can't be bothered till the next one and the next one. And when the next one comes, while you're bathed in light, you can think of me cursing the darkness.

When this whole mess is over, there is going to be a great divide in America. There's going to be the folks like me, too arrogant or too lazy to learn anything. And there will be folks like my neighbors who want to learn all they can, ask the

hard questions, and do all in their power to be prepared. In science, government, business, health care—may they be more like them and less like me.

On Thursday, I think it was, I listened to CNN interview Bishop T. D. Jakes, a dynamic pastor and author from a mega-Church in Texas. The anchor asked how he and his Church were adjusting to these times of isolation, seclusion, shut-down. His answer fascinated me. He said two things. One, they were already positioned to transition. They were ready to do things that these times require. Two, they continued to impact their community because that's what they've always been doing. That spoke to my heart because that's our reality too. Thanks to so many of you, we were positioned to transition. And thanks to who we are as a Church, we have jumped right in to help our neighbors, our elderly, our fellow citizens.

I'll mention just one more thing. Alida already mentioned a couple of others. We started this "Bridge the Gap Fund," a two-pronged attack to help others during this crisis. With the money you're giving, we are using local restaurants and delis to provide food for people really stressed and stretched by this economic crash. And we're providing gift cards for food and medication to help people through their down times. A little boost here and loving presence across the isolation, a "thank you," a reminder that no one is forgotten, that all the promises of our Christian faith, of the Bible, of this Church, those promises are true.

We believe it. We do it. Even now.

Let's sing together Hymn No. 595, "Be Thou My Vision."

*Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  
naught be all else to me, save that thou art  
thou my best thought, by day or by night,  
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.*

*Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;  
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;  
thou my redeemer, my love thou hast won,  
thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.*

*Riches I heed not, nor vain empty praise,  
thou mine inheritance, now and always:  
thou and thou only, first in my heart,  
Great God of heaven, my treasure thou art.*

*Great God of heaven, my victory won,  
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!  
Heart of my heart, whatever befall,  
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.*