

LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR

November 26 2017

Isaiah 65:17-25

I Thessalonians 5:1-11

Matthew 25:1-13

Standing...

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our focus this morning is on the Last Day—
and our lessons—
the last ones for the Church Year,
teach us that all our earthly pursuits will cease...

The End is certain.
The Last Judgment is coming.

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Sitting...

Our Gospel lesson takes place during Holy Week.
The context is Jesus speaking of the need to be watchful,
ready for His return.
This is the capstone of His teaching,
for the main character—the bridegroom—finally appears...

We're told of ten young girls—five wise / five foolish,
on their way to a wedding ceremony,
giddy with delight.

Since receiving the invitation to be bridesmaids,
they expect nothing but tea and cake
and posting selfies on social media.

Prior to this, the bridegroom and bride would be betrothed—just as Joseph and Mary were when the angel Gabriel appeared to her.
During the betrothal, the bridegroom would return to his father's house and build onto it, making preparations for his future wife. The bridegroom would tell his beloved, "I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." [*John 14:3*] Sound familiar?

At a specified time, the bridegroom, along with his friends, would go with festival procession to the home of the bride. There they would meet the bride and her friends and all would process together to their new home for the consummation of the marriage and wedding festivities.

So, the bridesmaids—both wise and foolish—have all arrived,
 but what they do not know is that the bridegroom is delayed.
 Girl-talk and giggles go on into the evening.
 Lamps are lit and,
 the wedding party—well it turns into a slumber party:
 for all ten get drowsy,
 heads nod and eventually, they sack out.

First-century lamps were small. They are saucer-shaped vessels with a cover and what looked like a spout for the wick. They were not made to burn all night. That's why the wise girls, the sensible girls, bring extra oil.

As everyone snoozes, one awakens to see and hear the approaching company off in the distance. The cry is made, "The bridegroom's here! Come out to meet him." All the girls jump up. Hair is primped, things are gathered and wicks are trimmed.

Keep in mind: In ancient Jewish culture, the emphasis was not placed upon the bride, not like it is in our culture—the emphasis was placed upon the bridegroom.

"He's here!" But not everyone is ready. The foolish girls—discover their oil has run out. However, the wise girls, the ones who insisted upon bringing extra oil, are asked to share what they have.

"There won't be enough for us if we give some to you."
 Which is true!
 If this request is granted,
 there was the danger all would lack enough and be refused admission
 to the party. The wise will not risk that...
 So they tell the foolish girls to go get their own...
 we cannot share.

And while they're gone, the bridegroom arrives.
 Those who were prepared—the wise—go with him,
 and the door is shut.

Sometime later, the fools return, saying, (KNOCKING)
 "Lord, lord, open to us."
 But the bridegroom answers,
 "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you."
 And with that the parable ends.
 Jesus concludes saying,
 "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

It's tempting to get sidetracked when we hear this parable.
 Sidetracked wondering why the wise girls didn't share—
 and where in the world will the foolish get oil at this time of night...?
 Keep the main thing the main thing.

Our Lord Jesus is the bridegroom,
 who has no doubt been greatly delayed.
 And just as the Ten fell asleep waiting on Him,
 so the vast majority of us will do the same.
 We will sleep in death before He comes.
 Yet, there's no guarantee is there?
 For we know neither the day nor the hour.

Therefore, our entire lives are to be lived in joyful expectation that the bridegroom could come at any moment. And when He does...

The dead will be raised from their sleep.
 The living will be changed in a moment,
 in the twinkling of an eye,
 and all creation will stand before Him.

Folks, the Bible begins with a marriage,
 where our first parents—Adam and Eve—were united in holy matrimony.
 Here, we learn that God in Jesus Christ unites Himself with His people,
 the Church, just as a bridegroom to the bride.
 And there's a party—a huge party—one you don't want to miss.
 And so, we wait for the reappearing of our hidden bridegroom, who has
 promised, "I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive
 you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." [John 14:3]

Some will be prepared for this Day.
 Others won't.
 Some go into the party.
 Others don't.
 Some go to heaven.
 Others will not.

And the one question I have for you, at the conclusion of this Church Year is,
 Will you be ready?
 Will you be ready to follow Him into the eternal marriage feast?
 Or will you find yourself outside in eternal darkness?
 For those who find themselves outside the marriage feast with the doors
 shut and no hope of entering in—
 they're the biggest fools of all.

Does being ready take being a member of Mensa, or Phi Beta Kappa,
 or an incredibly high score on your ACT or SAT?
 Not at all...

St Paul writes, “the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.”
 Foolish then are those who think that the cross of Jesus is foolish.

Who then are the wise?

St Paul writes because of God,
 you are in Christ, who became to us the wisdom of God.

The wise are those who have Christ.

For Christ has not only become to us wisdom from God
 but also righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.
 The foolish vir(d)gins are foolish because they rejected Christ.
 The wise vir(d)gins are wise because they have Christ.
 Those who have Christ have wisdom.
 Those who have wisdom have oil,
 and light and entrance into the marriage feast.

Alright, so for those of us who have Christ, how do we keep watch?

We wait for the One who is to come by watching the One who has come.
 And we have Him in the proclamation of His forgiveness—
 in the washing of His baptism—
 in the preaching of His Word—
 and in the eating of His supper.

And when the Bridegroom finally appears and is no longer hidden,
 you will see Him and be ready
 you will trim your lamps
 and go in to the wedding banquet of heaven that He has prepared for you.
 For you have been watching by faith all along.

At the close of yet another Church Year,
 we join with churches on earth
 and the saints in heaven by saying,
 MARNATHA—Come quickly Lord Jesus, Amen.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and
 minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.