

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’”

Either you are ready, or you are not. It’s “either or” as Jesus presents in the parable of the Ten Virgins. He’s teaching you about when he returns on the Last Day. With each of those two groups goes a future; ready you have a place at the wedding feast but unprepared you stand outside of the feast where the Lord doesn’t know you. One is pure joy, and the other is terrifying. The seriousness in all of this is seen in this reading. We all do well to listen carefully to what Jesus says.

“Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’”

Last week we heard of the Last Day, the day of judgment, which will come, where Jesus will separate all people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Today we hear about the end as well but this time it’s specifically directly to the church, to those who claim to be a part of God’s people. This text is often used when understanding how God reveals within the visible church on earth there are those who are Christians and those who are hypocrites, that is those who say they believe but inwardly are unbelievers. The head scratcher is always who are the foolish ones and who are the wise.

This question is often addressed by trying to figure out what each little detail in the parable is and then we can see some hidden meaning. The problem with that approach, though, is twofold. First off, it goes against the understanding of Scripture as a whole. There is a clarity to the Scriptures where we know what God is saying to us. Sure, there are tough passages, but this is where Scripture interprets Scripture for us to see the meaning of a particular reading. The other issue is the nature of parables. Parables, especially in Matthew Gospel teach us about God’s Kingdom and how he rules as King. There are elements where he uses these to teach his disciples and others are excluded who are not a part of the kingdom. There is usually, though, an important line or element of that parable in what Jesus says which jumps out at us to drive home the point.

Here Jesus is teaching you, his people, a key theme when he says, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” You are commanded by God to watch lest you be the foolish ones, the door closed before you, and you stand outside of the feast, outside of salvation. The difference between the two groups which makes one set ready is the oil in the lamps of the “wise” virgins. Their wisdom is seen in how they knew to keep extra oil. Their lamps were ready because they knew it wasn’t dependent upon them when the bridegroom was going to come so they were at his mercy whenever he chose to arrive.

So, think about that, then, in terms of who you are in this world. Wisdom in the Bible is often synonymous with faith in Christ and there are connections, as well, to the fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom. Still, faith in Christ is wisdom. Hearing his word and believing it is wisdom. Trusting in God and his word is wisdom. Living out this word and faith is a life of wisdom. Foolishness, on the other hand, is not believing in Christ. The fool says in his heart, “there is no God.” The fool doesn’t hear God’s word. The fool takes no counsel or delight in what God teaches. Instead, the fool delights in expressing his own opinion and listening to those who mock God. The foolish life is a live lived where God and his word and are not at the forefront.

Last Sunday of the Church Year—November 20, 2022

Perhaps a simple rule of thumb could be seen in how one approaches his life. The fool asks, “What do I think or feel and what do I want?” whereas the wise asks, “What does God say through his word?”

Hearing this today, look at yourself. You are visibly in the church of God. You have been given the gift of faith by the Holy Spirit. Don’t be foolish, seek wisdom. The danger is real, and it hits so close to home for so many of us. We have friends, family members, coworkers, and other people we know who would say, “I am a Christian.” They might even post it all over social media or decorate their houses as such. What did those foolish virgins have, though, in the Gospel reading? “For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them.” The foolish had lamps just like the wise ones but their lamps ran out of oil. They were told to wait for the bridegroom. They were like the seed in the parable of the Sower where they believed for a while and then fell away. The faith of the foolish virgins was something of a nice sentiment in their life they could display but not a burning light they cared for and took seriously. When the bridegroom was delayed, when things didn’t happen according to their schedule and liking, they simply didn’t care enough to be ready. The warning for us, for you, though is to ask yourself this question, “Am I ready? Is my lamp full of oil? Am I one of the wise?”

Listen again to these words from the second reading, “Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”

When you look at yourself and examine your life you see your sin. Jesus is coming and you will either meet him first if you die/fall asleep and he calls you to himself or he returns while you are still on this earth. The urgency is the same regardless. You see the need to wake up and turn from your sin against God in your life. You see the need to be fed by God’s holy word and sacraments. You see the dangers of apostasy, that is falling away from the Christian faith. Think about the events the past couple of years. In our world today so many of us are trying to be extra cautious and careful. We see the warnings on television, the internet, or whatever and we think to ourselves, “I’d better take things going on and do what I need to do to stay safe.” Or we think about other things such as Christmas and think, “I have so much to do to buy gifts plan meals or a trip and get ready.” Yet again we might say, “I or my kid has a big game coming up so we’d better practice and get ready, so we are prepared to meet what is to come.” Now, all those things in and of themselves are not necessarily bad but imagine if we put that amount of effort into our Christian faith that we so easily and willingly do in other aspects of life.

The things of this world are momentary and here one day and gone the next. God does call us to be good stewards of what we have and live out our vocations in this world but not at the expense of or neglecting the call of Jesus in his word. The things of God are eternal concerning both body and soul. Nothing is more important than receiving the means of grace lest we forget that and think other things are more pressing, or important. There is nothing more important in this world and nothing more needed than the saving word of God and the life-giving medicine of the Lord’s Supper. The devil wants you to think otherwise, he wants you to think you have enough oil and that there’s still before the bridegroom, the Lord, returns but don’t listen to the lies which want you to reject this or distract or deflect you into thinking there are mitigating issues or circumstances. You don’t know better than God; fools think that way. You know what God wants, commands, and gives as he reveals it in and through his word, this is how the wise think. You need Jesus and what he gives. Don’t be foolish. Jesus said to the foolish virgins, “Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.” There are no second chances for the foolish virgins. That’s it, it’s done and over with and it’s an eternal thing. Think about that and those words of Jesus. Hear his warning to you right now, the warning to your friends, family, and all his people, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

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Wisdom is found in Christ, and he makes you wise. What does God say about you? “But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” The great joy of this Last Sunday of the Church Year is that Christ has died for you. Your sin is forgiven, and you have a place at the feast which knows no end. You are his bride, the church washed clean and without spot or blemish.

“The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” See Christ crucified for you and see your place in the wedding hall of salvation. Hear the Scriptures read and proclaimed to you and have the Wisdom of God. Cling to the waters of your baptism and rejoice that you have been given the wisdom from on high and marked as the Lord’s bride, the church. Feast at his altar and know that you will feast forever with all of God’s saints in the new heavens and the new earth he will create for you. Jesus makes you ready and he calls out through his ministers, “Wake, awake for night is flying!” Lift your eyes dear saints and see your Lord who is coming. Trim your lamps and wait with eager expectation for that day the Lord comes for you and know that he is coming soon.

The joy of this day, the end of the church year, is the joy that Jesus is your Bridegroom. End this church year with shouts of Alleluia! Rejoice with great joy knowing that you have a place with Jesus forever. Have confidence today as you see your Lord and he makes you ready and keeps you in this faith. Jesus keeps your lamps filled and burning as he graciously gives you his word and sacraments. Hear and feast with great joy and sing boldly with all of God’s people, “Now let all the heavens adore thee, let saints and angels sing before thee with harp and cymbals clearest tone. Of one pearly each shining portal, where, joining with the choir immortal, we gather round thy radiant throne. No eye has seen the light, no ear has heard the might of thy glory; therefore, will we eternally sing hymns of praise and joy to thee!” What a beautiful image to sing about today and what a beautiful image to see and watch for with joyful anticipation. You are ready for the day which is your future with Christ forever. This Church Year is ending. Jesus says, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” As the people of God made wise in Christ you cry out knowing Advent is on the horizon, “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!”

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