

Last Sunday 2024
Matt. 25:1-13 (ESV)

Jesus said, “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.”

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

Blessings to all of you, dear ones, on this last Sunday of the church year. And how very appropriate it is to have the parable of the ten virgins as our Gospel lesson for today.

Because not only do we see in it that the Lord will finally appear and make His glorious entrance, not only will it be revealed who is truly foolish and wise and whether those called to be God’s people among us were well prepared for this great event, but by the end of our text, dear ones, we see what our Lord is preparing to bring us into at the culmination of this present age and, in fact, what He’s been preparing to bring about in His divine wisdom since the time when the world began.

Together, the end of our Lord’s parable and all that will take place at the end of the age—they illuminate and make known what’s been unfolding and set in motion by God’s grace from the beginning.

Our Lord’s parable begins with great excitement and anticipation. The day of the marriage feast will soon be at hand and the noble bridegroom is removed so that the necessary preparations can be made, so that all things will be made ready for the celebration to commence at the proper time.

The bridegroom removes himself to make preparations.

As you know, when preparing for a wedding and the feast to follow, there’s a lot of work to be done.

In the ancient near East, the bridegroom was the one responsible for all this

Preparing the best food and drink that he can;

Preparing a place for his new bride;

Preparing to make his grand entrance to retrieve his beloved and gather those invited for the great celebration

Again, it was the bridegroom’s responsibility to do all this. And if you balk at the idea of being at a wedding reception for more than an hour and a half, you should know that in the ancient near east, sometimes their feasting and celebrations could last for a whole week!

You can imagine just how much effort went into an event like this.

The bridegroom had to be very prudent—he had to be diligent in taking the appropriate action at the appropriate time given the circumstances as he made his preparations so that everything would be ready when the time came.

And of course, it wasn't only he who had to be prudent with his time, but also as you see in the parable, those invited to join in the marriage feast had to be prudent as well, lest they bring terrible shame upon themselves and be horribly disrespectful to the bridegroom who had done so much for them.

They couldn't just carelessly and aimlessly go about their business during this time of preparation. You can't just get ready for a marriage feast like this last minute and expect it to go well. They had to be mindful of what was soon to come and act accordingly. They needed to embody the wisdom of the Lord.

Because when the Lord went about His work of creating the world in the beginning, He certainly wasn't careless and aimless in what He did. He manifested His wisdom in His works of creation and the preparations He set out to make.

He not only separated light from darkness and fashioned each and every one of the stars in the cosmos, but He stretched out the heavens above like a beautiful canopy adorned with festive lights.

He not only filled the world He made with a multitude of creatures and lush vegetation, but He planted a garden with an abundance of food for feasting. He established Eden as a sanctuary—a holy venue for what was soon to come.

Dear ones, the Lord our God was not only creating the heavens and the earth and everything in them, but in His wisdom and prudence, He was making everything ready for the marriage feast of Adam and Eve.

And by the end of the first week of creation, we see what the Lord set out to prepare from the very beginning. You can see His wisdom in the fruits of His labor. And it was a labor of love that He devoted Himself to.

So too, when the Lord Jesus began the work of His earthly ministry, He first manifested His glory at a wedding, turning water into wine.

As the incarnate Lord of heaven and earth, He set about His work of making all things new—of bringing about a new creation, only this time He Himself is the new Adam, and the holy church is His beloved bride.

Christ has labored at length for our sake. He has fulfilled the whole Law for us. He has given Himself up for us, that He might sanctify us. He's gone so far as to give His own body and blood on the cross for our redemption, and He's prepared them to be our nuptial food and drink, a foretaste here and now of the feast to come which is more exquisite than anything else in all the world.

The Lord Christ has even gone to prepare a place in His Father's house, an eternal dwelling for His bride to live forever in holy union with Him.

All of these things our divine bridegroom has been preparing. All of this He's been devoting Himself to in His wisdom, in a labor of love to celebrate the marriage feast with us.

So, to what have you been devoting yourself in anticipation of this marriage feast? Have you been active and wise in your preparations for when He makes His grand entrance?

Because the fate of the foolish virgins will fall on everyone who's been careless in these things.

Our text tells us that it wasn't just that there was no oil found among the foolish virgins. No, the text says this: that they took no oil with them. The verb is active. They actively, willfully chose not to prepare as they should.

Despite all that the bridegroom had done for them, despite all the preparations He made and the great effort and wisdom and love He showed in going about His work, the foolish virgins just couldn't be bothered do what they so clearly needed to do so that they could be ready.

What is it to them whether the bridegroom arrives at midnight? Quite frankly, it shouldn't matter what time He gets there—day or night—they should be ready. You should be ready. Nobody in their right mind would want to miss this, and He expected them to be faithfully prepared. How could they not?

And on the surface, the foolish virgins may well have looked like they were doing what they should have. There might not have been much reason at all to be concerned for them from the outside. And on the inside, they may well have let themselves think they'd really be fine doing what they needed to do just to keep up appearances, just going through the motions and appearing to check all the right boxes—and surely no one would know any different in the end, would they?

Well, in the end, the empty vessel which obviously should have had oil in it reveals the true emptiness of the preparations the foolish virgins began to make. It also reveals their true level of respect for the bridegroom.

Because they decided to turn away from what they needed and from the way He expected to meet them when He arrived. Their lamps were quenched, and they were left in shame and darkness outside the marriage feast.

So will it be for people who just go through the motions of coming to church and who may appear to be like any other Christian from the outside, but on the inside, within the vessel of their hearts, they're empty and devoid of the Holy Spirit and His gifts received by faith.

These people don't take preaching and God's Word to heart.

Truth be told, they really aren't concerned with taking hold of the forgiveness, life, and salvation available to them through the means of grace.

They might be too ashamed to admit this, and they'd be extremely offended if anyone ever dared to suggest it, but sometimes the truth hurts. And really, more than anything else, they'd rather be at a sporting event on Sunday mornings or maybe enjoying vacation somewhere. That's really where their priorities are. And those are the things that really make them light up

more than anything else, even more than the kindness and mercy the Lord has shown us in Christ.

Darkness awaits them.

But for all of you who've been faithfully waiting and preparing for our Bridegroom's appearing, for all of you whose hearts have been filled with the Spirit, having been lavished with all the riches of His grace—be sure of this: that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no heart has conceived of all that God has prepared for those who love Him—what He's prepared for you.

On account of faith, you will be luminous and radiant—like the five wise virgins—on that great day as Christ receives you and all the saints into the marriage feast, into pure bliss with Him in His kingdom, which has no end.

So prepare your hearts and make ready while there's still time and be watchful for His appearing because this is what's coming for us, dear ones. And the end of this age will make known what's been unfolding from the beginning and all that our Lord has been preparing in His wisdom, in a labor of love.

To Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.