

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

“But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’”

As a father, it’s always a joy when your kids are at that age when they like to see you. Our youngest, Vera, is at that stage when I get home when she first sees me, she gives me a giant smile. Sometimes she wants to come to me and have me hold her. It’s not to say the other kids aren’t excited to see me, they usually are and greet me with a “hi dad!” They are excited their dad is home. They enjoyed being with Rebekah, to be sure, and they looked forward to when I came home. They want us all to be together and they look forward to it.

The return of Jesus on the Last Day is something to look forward to as Christians. You’ve been hearing that the past of couple of weeks. The Lord promises he is coming again, and he is coming to judge the living and the dead as we confess every week in the Creed and we heard last Sunday when Jesus talked about the sheep and the goats. Today, it’s no different. Nothing has changed but he focuses on another point in this parable before you now. Jesus is preparing you for this day even as he is taking care of you now. This is the end of the church year and the last words of the Gospel reading end on a note, though, that is serious. Jesus said, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” This warning of Jesus is something to pay attention to and heed what he says.

Jesus gives a parable relating what the situation will be like when he comes on the last day and how this happens according to God’s working. “Then 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.”

It’s a familiar story but like last week there are some questions that arise. The first is, who is Jesus talking to here? Often, and perhaps this is part of our sinful nature to think this way, we want to see this parable in terms of an us versus the world type of thing where we are safe from the accusations and warning. We want to think the wise virgins are the ones sitting here in church and the foolish are those people who aren’t here. Well, foolishness in the Bible is equated with unbelief and God teaches us outside the church there is no salvation, because refusing and separating yourself from the means of grace which is receiving Christ and his is a serious thing. Yet when we hear this parable as those sitting here today, we want to think we are out of the clear. But Jesus is speaking this to his disciples. He’s speaking to those who, in fact, have been hearing his teaching. So, the warning is for you, it’s for Christians.

The next question which arises is what does all this mean in the details? Much has been written on this subject and it’s not to say that isn’t a worthwhile study. There’s a danger, though, to lose sight of the forest for the sake of the trees in the parables of Jesus and especially in this one. It’s easy to take something too far by way of allegory to where the point is obscured or a different meaning arises. So how do we read this? Usually there will be a word, phrase, or something that sticks out when Jesus uses a parable. It may be something that’s very odd or different. In the case of this one before us, it’s the phrase at the end that jumps out at us. “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” While the details are important and matter, the point Jesus is making is that you don’t know when he is returning so be ready.

There’s an urgency to the Christian faith that we do well to remember. The Christian faith and apathy don’t go together. There’s no putting off what God says, and you are the one who works him into your schedule and not the other way around. It’s a call to repentance, then in the words of Jesus. He calls you to a faith that sees your whole life as something which has been redeemed by God and your inheritance is not of this world. There are many reasons why the foolish virgins didn’t bring enough oil but all of it boils down to the fact that they weren’t ready when the bridegroom came. Their foolishness is they were not thinking ahead and looking forward to the Lord’s return. They thought they had gone through the motions, and it appeared as though they were wise but deep down they were just putting on a show. They were the kids who the dad said to be ready to go out when he comes home but they spent their time playing and when dad came home to take them somewhere special, they weren’t dressed, hadn’t gone potty, and their shoes were off, so the kids missed out. They put the arrival of their dad and taking them out as something out of sight and out

of mind. It's similar here. The virgins didn't want to obey another person's word they wanted to live their lives according to their liking and their time. They were just foolish, unbelievers who didn't see the need to be ready for the bridegroom to come at any time. They thought they had time and weren't bothered to be looking to the future.

So, what makes the other virgins wise? The word for "wise" in this reading from Matthew can be translated in another way and it's telling. It can be translated as "prudent." Prudence is an important thing for Christians and is a virtue. I asked my kids last night what this word means and they told me, in a sense, "planning for the future." They weren't wrong in what they said. We could also add to this definition, "acting with care and showing thought for the future." The wise virgins were prudent in their lives. They lived each day with the future in mind. They knew that the bridegroom said he is coming so they better be ready whenever he may come. They looked at each day as if it was the last and went to bed each night thinking this very well could be the time they would meet the bridegroom. Their lives were lived with that in mind so that even when they fell asleep at night, they knew they had been prudent to stock up on oil to be ready for if he comes in the middle of the night.

The wise or prudent virgins still grew tired. They weren't immune from that. We grow weary and tired. There's something to that in this reading as all the virgins fall asleep. It could be this refers to death as falling asleep is often a euphemism for death in the Bible. I don't necessarily disagree. What we do see though is as we are hearing this on this side of the grave is the hope this gives us. Either in life or in death, the Lord is the bridegroom who comes for us his bride.

Growing weary and tired is a real thing and something we face. Sin, death, and the devil, are not just abstract concepts which exist in theory. These things attack and assail us as we go through this life. Our bodies reap the consequences of sin as we suffer illness, decay, and various other trials. As Christians we endure these things patiently. We look forward to that day when the Lord comes again as he comes for us. Where faith comes into play is as we endure these things we fix our eyes on the Lord and trust his promises. We lay down our heads at night in the confidence of Jesus and what he has done, continues to do, and promises in our future in him.

As Christians you have this warning of Jesus today to be ready. You aren't out of the loop with what Jesus says now and what he says will happen. In the Epistle reading God wrote, "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." You have God's word before you. So then, what? Repent of your sin and seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Set your minds on the things of God and view each day through the lens of what is to come. Be prudent. Last week in the Epistle reading from 2 Peter 3 you heard, "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace."

You don't know when Jesus will return but you know that he is coming. What do you think about that day? How do you think you are ready? If all of you answers point back to yourself then fear the day Jesus returns. If Jesus comes to you now here in this place and delivers to you salvation and you see it as a burden or unnecessary and that you don't need what he has commanded and promised you here, then what does that say about when he comes again on the Last Day? If you want to meet Jesus and greet him with excuses and attempts to tell him that you really have tried to do what you could in all of the things you have done in your life then know right now what Jesus will say to you, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you."

So, what does this mean? How is that you have confidence for that day and see it as something to look forward to when you see Jesus? How do you know what Jesus will say to you? Thanks be to God this isn't up to you but it's the work of God to and for you. The Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel. He is the one who has made you wise in salvation

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and he is the one who keeps you in it through his means of grace. Can you have confidence to be ready and face that day when the bridegroom returns? Absolutely. How? You stand as one who is forgiven. The cry of the wise virgins is the cry you sing every Sunday. “Lord, have mercy! Christ have mercy! Lord, have mercy!” You see you have the confidence to face that day because you know who your bridegroom is; he is your Redeemer. God says, “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.” Even before the foundation of the world God chose you for his own because of his grace and mercy in Christ. This word of God that your sin is forgiven and Jesus has died for you is the confidence you have to face that day and look forward to it because your Lord is Jesus and he is taking you to a place of eternal joy and peace that you heard about in the Old Testament reading.

So, what about you, who are you and what is your cry now as you await that day? Rejoice, rejoice believers! Your bridegroom is coming. Be ready by gathering around where he is already to be found, his word and sacraments and proclaim his death until he comes again. Repent of your sin and cling to Jesus. Be the kid waiting at the window for his dad to come home and goes running to the door. Begin every day knowing that you belong to Christ and your future is with him. Lay down your head each night in the confidence of your baptism that you are a sinner, yet the Lord has made payment for your sin, and you have eternal life. You go through this life reconciled to God. Look forward to that day with great anticipation and see your whole life as one lived with this future in mind. Through times of joy, sadness, or even facing death you are prudent because you know that Jesus is the victor and his glory is everlasting. Encourage one another with these words even as the Lord does for you. Fix your eyes on the horizon and grab your lamps for midnight is upon you, the hall has been prepared, the feast is ready, and the bridegroom is on his way and it’s going to be a great day dear saints of God even better than you can imagine. So as God’s people, his bride the church, you close this Church year with that image before you and the promise of Jesus. Hearing this word, you know what comes next. Advent is upon you so “Come, Lord Jesus!”

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