Last Sunday of the Church Year—November 22, 2026

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

"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."

The promise of the Lord's return is one of joy for those who belong to him. God gives you the images of singing and feasting today. But it's not just singing and feasting for their own sake but something more personal. The Gospel reading this Sunday proclaims to you that you are none other than the bride. You are the church and when the Lord returns, in great power and glory, he does so because he has prepared a place you, for his church. He returns and calls you to the wedding feast where you are not simply the guest, but the feast is for you.

Now, just as the Lord's coming and judgment are realities you know will occur and already have these proclaimed to you these past two weeks, the same can be said about the urgency in this all. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins warns you and comforts you. Either you are ready, or you are not. It's "either or" as Jesus presents in the parable. With each of those two groups goes a future; the ready have a place at the wedding feast but the unprepared stand outside of the hall where the Lord doesn't know them. One is pure joy, and the other is terrifying. We all do well to listen carefully to what Jesus says.

"[Jesus said:] "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."

The wise virgins feared the Lord and the foolish ones did not. This fear is not something like fearing the boogeyman or some other entity in a horror movie. The wise virgins feared the Lord. The bridegroom promised he was coming and so they trusted his word. He's the bridegroom and if he says he's coming for them then he is, and they are going to be ready. Being ready is the language of repentance and faith. It's a fear that realizes your place before the Lord as he is God and you are not. There's no place in the Kingdom of God for arrogance and scoffing. The word for the fool here is connected to our English word, "moron." Think about that for a second and the attitude of the foolish virgins. Let that sink it when it comes to the attitude one should have toward the Lord's word and really the Lord himself. The contrast between the wise and foolish is striking.

There's another dynamic in the reading that teaches you more about what is to be your life. The word for "wise" in this reading from Matthew can be translated in another way that gives some more depth. It can be translated as "prudent." Prudence is an important thing for Christians and is a virtue. Proverbs 8:12, as one example says, "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion." Prudence can be seen as "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.

Regarding the foolish, it's no coincidence that the Scriptures teach how God makes foolish the wisdom of the world. The thought that you can someone be above God, dismiss him, or think you have everything figured out is nothing other than moronic. It's to be so stubbornly ignorant and willfully pushing God aside that you are a fool. And the funny or rather sad thing about this even more is that the fool thinks he's wise in his foolishness. Really the fool isn't thinking, even if he may appear to be smart or have some wisdom, whatever that may mean. He's not thinking in terms of the future and he's not looking observing what's around him. The fool is well, a fool.

In a similar manner there's a temptation to find wisdom in all the wrong places and sources. We like it when we have things figured out and think there is some semblance of control we can have on our future. 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. 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? What do I think is best?" whereas the wise asks, "What does God say through his word? Lord, help me."

Don't be a fool, wake up. The Lord is coming and something happens in the parable as Jesus goes on to say, "As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept." The foolish virgins fell asleep and yes, so did the wise. They became drowsy and were overcome by sleep. Something happens. It's called living life in this world. Even the wise virgins fall asleep. They wait with anticipation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

You need to be awakened. You need to be awakened from sin to faith. You need to be awakened from death to life. You need to be awakened from this side of glory into the eternal wedding feast of eternity. The constants are your need for your Lord who does all these things to you and for you and the Lord himself who is faithful in it all. He is the one who awakens you.

Your Lord has awakened you. The Holy Spirit has called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified you. You have been given the wisdom of God in Christ. Your faith in Jesus looks outside of yourself. In so far as you are in this world, you grow tired and weary. The devil, the world, and your fallen flesh tempt you to doubt the Lord as you go through this life. Every year you hear the Lord is coming and it seems as though as last week in the Epistle, the fools are the ones who are based when they scoff, "see, look, the Lord hasn't shown up. Live your life not in view of a promise but in terms of what you experience around you, what you see, and what you can know and discover on your own."

This is where God keeps calling you to wake up. Jesus had to keep waking up his dosing disciples on the night of his betrayal. The Lord was praying and the disciples grew tired and slept. The Lord was preparing and those told to stay awake fell asleep. The night is at hand. Drowsiness is everywhere and it's contagious. But this is nothing new. This is where the church has been and is on this side of the Last Day. The watchmen are crying out to awaken from your sleep. The preachers are preaching, they are crying out. The call of God's word goes out which calls through the law to repentance and brings forgiveness, life, and salvation through the gospel.

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. Examine your life. See what it is you put all time into and planning. It's good to be good stewards of what you have here and now but not at the expense of your Lord. Think about how much time and effort you put into some many things in this life which are here today and then gone in the blink of an eye simply in this life let alone won't be for eternity, 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. Ask yourself, "who are what do I fear? Where do I look for wisdom? What defines my life?" The urgency in God's call to wake up is vivid. You see the need to wake up and turn from your sin against God in your life. You see the need to be fed and sustained by God. You see the dangers of apostasy, which is falling away from the Christian faith.

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."

God calls you daily to wake up, turn from your sin, repent. Know who you are as the baptized. You are no fool but the redeemed, the bride of Christ. As your eyes grow weary and heavy look to Jesus who promises you the eternal rest is at hand. The promise of rest and refreshment apart from Jesus are merely a façade. Only in Christ is there refreshment and rest here and now and promise of an eternity without suffering, sickness, sin, and death. Wake up and cling to Lord through his word and sacraments as he forgives you, guards you, strengthens you, and refreshes you through this world and gives you a foretaste of the feast to come. God prepares you as he forgives you and gives you Christ and his salvation.

What do the wise virgins do when they are awakened from their sleep? Listen again, "But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps." The wise virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. They prepared to go out and meet the bridegroom. They didn't get up and complain, "it's about time." They didn't get up and make an excuse, "I was only resting my eyes, I wasn't really asleep." No, they get up and get ready to go. They know the hour has come, everything is ready, and the bride has arrived to take them to the feast.

Wisdom is found and given in Christ, and he makes you wise. What does God say about you? "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 and called you his own. 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, "Wake, awake for night is flying!" Lift your eyes dear saints and see your Lord who is coming. Trim you lamp and wait with eager expectation for that day the Lord comes for you and know that he is coming soon.

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 and the Church Year sets you cry out knowing Advent is dawning on the horizon, “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!”

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