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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
November 15, 2020
Saints Triumphant
24th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 52:1-6; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Hymns: 343:1-3; 609; 307; 309

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 25:1-13

“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Now five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. ³ Those who *were* foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. ⁵ But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

⁶ “And at midnight a cry was *heard*: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ ⁷ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us *some* of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘*No*, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

¹¹ “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ ¹² But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’

¹³ “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, Who shall come again in glory, dear fellow
Redeemed:

INTRO: Broad Generalities

Thinking in broad generalities can quite easily take over our lives. Let me ask you, are you ready for winter? Your first inclination might be to answer that question from an emotional perspective, “No, I want some more nice warm weather like earlier this month.” No, I’m asking, are you *prepared* for winter? Ah, now maybe you think about the list of chores that need to be accomplished before winter sets in if you live in Minnesota. Again we tend to think in generalities, maybe saying, “Yeah pretty much, got the hoses put away, raked up most of the leaves, washed some windows.” But is that list complete? Is the car ready? Did you check the tires? Is the coolant/antifreeze level good? How about snowbrushes and scrapers, and an emergency kit for bad weather? Has you had the furnace checked? Is a new furnace filter installed? Do any doors or windows need weather stripping or one of those insulating kits? When we start getting specific, we may find that we need to pay much more attention to preparing for the coming winter than we realized.

Now, how about another event that is coming just as certainly as winter. How are you doing with preparations for the Lord’s coming? He is coming and it is as we sing in the hymn:
“The day is surely drawing near When God’s the Anointed,
Shall with great majesty appear As Judge of all appointed.”
(The Lutheran Hymnal 611:1)

We might do ourselves a grave disservice if we are thinking about this preparation in just broad generalities. That is what our human nature leads us to do. In fact it is very common for Christians to neglect this preparation to meet the Lord until something like serious illness or advanced age forces the issue. This need for preparation is what Jesus is addressing in our text this morning. In those last day before His sufferings and death Jesus addressed in great detail the subject of His final coming, and believers’

response and attitude toward that coming Day. Today's text is one of the parables Jesus presented with the intention of getting our attention that we give more serious consideration to our preparation for the Christ's return. --

**THEME: The Parable of the Ten Virgins
Defines Readiness for Christ's Return.**

We see first the ten virgins -

I. Possessing the Lamp of Faith.

The parable takes Jesus' audience to a special joyous occasion that would have common in their society, a wedding! While customs are different in our culture and in our time, we can relate to the joy of the occasion. It's a wedding celebration, but the reception can't begin without the bridegroom. In this parable we should identify Jesus as the Groom, and His Church as the Bride. Jesus' return in glory would be the final consummation of the great wedding of Jesus to His Church, bringing all the elect into the bliss and glory of the heavenly mansions for all eternity. It is an exciting prospect that should keep us all alert and attentive for the Lord's coming.

However, as it was with Jewish weddings, the groom's time of arrival was not always defined. It was left uncertain. The virgins were the bridesmaids, and it was their appointed task to go out and watch so that as the groom arrived they could not only alert the bride but set off the celebration as all the celebrants entered into the nuptial hall. In the parable the groom's arrival is delayed. It is getting on toward midnight. The young maidens are drowsy with sleep, indeed, they doze off. In spite of that are they ready?

They all have their lamps with which they will light the way for the groom's approach. Their lamps are burning. This is an interesting and most important detail for us. What would these lamps represent but the lamp of faith? All those who are present would be identified as professing Christians. They are all sort of prepared. But this is where we see Jesus make a distinction dividing the virgins into two groups, those who are sort of prepared, and those who are truly ready, prepared for the event whenever it might take place.

Jesus is not addressing this parable to unbelievers. He is addressing it to us believers, professing Christians who know and believe that the Lord Jesus is coming again in glory. Indeed, we look forward to that day with joy-filled anticipation. We all possess the lamp of faith that was provided for us by the Holy Spirit calling us to faith. Jesus is concerned that too many among us don't pay attention beyond that. Jesus is concerned that many whom He loves, many whom He has redeemed, many who have been called to faith, are neglecting their readiness for His appearing.

In the parable the announcement comes, "*at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!'*" (v.7) and there is immediate excitement, but a great deal of time has gone by, and those lamps of faith, well some of them are burning quite dimly because the oil that fuels that lamp of faith is running dangerously low. Five of the virgins have oil reserves to add to their lamps. Five did not bother to think that far ahead. So our second point focuses us on --

II. Securing Our Store of Lamp Oil.

What is it that fuels the lamp of faith but the gospel in word and sacrament! We know our own weakness of faith; isn't it apparent in us all? When we know our frailty and our sin, and how the difficult circumstances of life dim the light within us, it is right to the gospel we must go! WE need to hear of the power of God to deliver us and the love of God in Christ Jesus. We need to be assured again and again that our sins are forgiven, and that we live through faith in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit pours the oil of gladness into our hearts and the lamp of our faith brightens.

Securing this store of lamp oil within our hearts is so vitally important, and yet we tend to dismiss this point of preparation as unnecessary. Too many Christians think within themselves, and even tell the pastor, I already know all about Jesus. "I know what I need to know, I'm already a Lutheran," as if this enough, that we have done enough, and we can neglect our lamp of faith. We trust that it will burn brightly enough long enough as we go along in life even if we neglect our faith! But Jesus is telling us that is not the case. Our lamps need tending, refreshing the store of oil. We need

to dedicate ourselves to the reading and hearing and studying the Word of our Lord.

Faith is not constant. It doesn't stay the same as we make our way through life. Because of the frailty of our flesh our faith has its ups and downs and our faith will face opposition. The world bombards us with so much spiritual hogwash, often don't even recognize that what the world is peddling is something that undermines faith. The threat of this world and the weakness of our own flesh are so real that Jesus Himself posed the question, "*when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?*" (Luke 18:8)

We dare not take our faith for granted, thinking that it will always be there because I know I'm a Christian. The Bible contains many history lessons about those who neglected the Word of God. Concerning this Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians, These accounts "*were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*" ¹² *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*" (1 Corinthians 10:11-12) Don't be so sure of yourself. Leave your confidence in God. Build that confidence by hearing the Word, filling your heart with the oil of the gospel you will need in the end.

In Jesus' parable the foolish virgins turned to the wise virgins asking them to share their oil so they could replenish their lamps of faith. The wise virgins, had to say no. It couldn't be done! The foolish virgins hurried off to the market to find what they needed. The point is, I can't believe for you, neither can you believe for me. As much as we love our children, or our children love us, their parents we cannot believe for them. We each need saving faith within our own hearts. We each need the oil of the gospel to keep our lamps of faith burning bright.

When the trumpet sounds, when the call goes out announcing the Bridegroom, our Lord's arrival then we will need to be --

III. Responding Promptly to the Announcement of the Lord's Return.

The wise virgins were ready. The foolish virgins ran off looking to buy some oil.

Matthew 25:10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and **the door was shut**.

One needs to be ready. Almost ready, or pretty much ready, or ready in a little while, doesn't work. When the bridegroom came those who were ready went in with Him to the wedding, **and the door was shut**. The door was closed to any late comers. There will not be any wedding crashers.

Matthew 25:11-12 “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ ¹²But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’”

Those who were not quite ready, not quite ready enough heard some pretty tragic words, “I don't know you!” You don't want to be almost ready, but not quite ready, when Jesus the Bridegroom of the Church appears. You will find yourself on the outside, not even looking in, and the Lord will say, “You may think you know Me, but I don't know you!”

Jesus concluded the parable with the exhortation:

Matthew 25:13 “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”

We all know Jesus is coming. We all expect Him, but we don't know exactly when He will appear. Soon? The Lord said, “Behold, I am coming quickly!” (Revelation 3:11) How does a human being define the Lord's “quickly?” It is up to us to be attentive to our watching. It is more than gazing up into the sky occasionally. It is far more than simply giving it a passing thought from time to time. It is all about keeping a store of oil for our lamp of faith. Don't think in broad generalities, “I know who Jesus is?” Think in specifics, I need the gospel every day. I need to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I need to be “diligent to enter that rest,” (Hebrews 4:11) Diligent to feed my faith

on the truth of Christ Jesus who is coming to receive us to Himself in heaven.

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)