

Rev. Dan Welch Pent 23 11-8-20 Text- Matthew 25: 1- 13

There is a tradition that takes place at just about every wedding in America. I'm sure you're familiar with it. The blushing bride is accompanied down the aisle by a family member or loved one, most often her father. One of the perks of my job as a pastor is getting to witness that breath-taking, emotional sight when the bride appears in the entryway to the Sanctuary to begin her walk down the aisle. Whenever this happens, I get to re-live that very special day 26 years ago when it was my blushing, beautiful bride Amy slowly making her way down the aisle escorted by her father and all eyes on her.

Escorting the bride down the aisle is certainly a wonderful tradition but honestly I don't know how I'm going to hold up emotionally and physically when it's *my* turn to be the one who is escorting the bride up to the altar. All I know is that I will have my first crack at it next May 29th when I will be walking arm-in-arm with our daughter Stephanie down this *extremely* long aisle here at First Lutheran! (I think it's going to seem ten times longer than it already is that day!) I'm not sure where the tradition of walking the bride down the aisle has its beginning, all I do know is that I better be prepared for the big day, because it will be here soon! And that leads into our text for today which is about being prepared and also involves a wedding. (pause)

Back in the days of Jesus' visible earthly ministry the Jews had a special kind of wedding tradition of their own. Sometime after the groom had asked the bride to marry him and had gotten the consent of her parents, he would go over to the bride's house at some point during the early evening and escort her to the wedding banquet. Then on the way to the banquet, the bride's maiden companions- the virgins- would wait for the groom and bride to come. They would then escort the happy couple, lamp-in-hand to the place of the banquet. They would choose a place somewhere between the bride's house and the wedding banquet and wait there until the procession would pass. Then when the bride and groom arrived, they would use their lamps like torches in the joyful procession.

As our text for today opens up, Jesus has just finished explaining to His disciples what will take place as the end of the world draws near. Among other things He says, "lawlessness will be increased and the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12). Interestingly, that seems to be a very fitting description of the riots, unrest, and anger we have witnessed in our land over the last several months. In Matthew 24, Jesus also tells His disciples what it will be like when the end of the world actually *does* arrive. He says everyone on earth "will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great

glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Mt 24:30-31)

It’s very clear to see that Jesus wants His followers, including you and me, to be ready for His return on the Last Day. “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour”, He warns in verse 13 of our text. So let’s take a closer look at this parable of the Ten Virgins waiting for the bridegroom. As we do, we will see how it can help us to be ready to receive Christ on that day when He returns.

Getting right to the point: These 10 young women in the parable represent us -Christians - the members of Christ’s bride the Church. We are the ones who are now waiting for our Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ, to return to earth. And while we don’t know exactly *when* He will return, we know that Jesus will indeed return to this earth and escort His faithful people into the eternal wedding banquet of heaven.

The question for us seriously to consider is this: “Am I one of the ‘wise’ ones or am I one of the ‘foolish’ ones?” How do I *know* if I will be prepared for the Bridegroom’s return which could be at any time. Without a single doubt these have been trying times this year with the pandemic, lockdowns, quarantines, riots, contested elections, uncertainty about the future. Add to this fears, uncertainties and hardships we may be facing in our own lives, like sicknesses, loss of a loved one, financial hardship, and the list could go on. It definitely does seem that the return of Christ could be close at hand. But regardless of when our Lord does come, the big question is “Will I be ready?” and closely related to that “How can I have peace in my heart until then?” Let’s go to the best source: Jesus’ words, in particular as we find them in our reading today.

First of all, it is important to note that by all outward appearances, all ten virgins in this parable looked pretty much alike. All ten were likely very excited to be in the bridal procession. All ten had brought their lamps along with them. All ten were patiently waiting for the bridegroom. All ten were fully expecting to join the bridegroom at the wedding feast. And all ten fell asleep while they were waiting.

In a similar way, when we look at those who claim to be a Christian - they can all look very much alike—on the outside. They may have their names on the church roster. They might even be one of those who are in worship on a regular basis. They may also be giving offerings to the church. They may even be waiting for the Lord to return as the Judge of the living and the dead. They

may all be expecting to join the Bridegroom at the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb. But the truth is they may not all be prepared.

When you look at ten maidens in this parable what was the **one** thing which separated the “wise” from the “foolish”? (pause) **Personal preparation.** It was all about **being prepared.** The wise virgins were ready for the Bridegroom to come at a moment’s notice. The wise ones not only brought their lamps they also “took (plenty of) oil in jars along with their lamps.”

Now did the foolish virgins **forget** to do this? No. They **neglected** to do so. They probably anticipated that there would be some kind of common stock of oil from which they would be allowed to replenish their lamps once it was announced that the bridegroom was coming. But this was not to be the case. And do you know what else these foolish virgins neglected to prepare for? They neglected to prepare for the fact that they could not share in the oil of the “wise” virgins. They neglected to prepare for the fact that once the bridegroom arrived there would no longer be time for them to hurry off and find some oil of their own. They neglected to prepare for the fact that once the bridegroom arrived and ushered all those who were prepared into the wedding banquet the door would be shut. All who were not prepared were not allowed to enjoy the wedding feast. They would be banished from being in the presence of the bridegroom—forever! And where did it all begin? It all began with a lack of personal preparation. It all began with their neglect to bring along their own personal supply of oil.

What does it mean for **us** to be prepared for the return of the Jesus Christ? Our Lord Jesus says: “Make sure you have oil in your lamp!” This kind of oil isn’t sold down at NAPA or at Casey’s. This oil is manufactured and maintained by God the Holy Spirit! This oil is called faith. Faith in Jesus as the only Savior there is from sin - that’s how any person, that is, any sinner can be prepared for Jesus’ return. It’s trusting that Jesus sacrifice of His life on the cross was for you and your sins. It’s trusting that when He rose from the dead, this means you also will have eternal life with God. As Romans 10:9 tells us, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you **will be saved.**” It is this faith in God that because of His promises to you in Christ, you are completely forgiven of all of your sins. It’s faith that believes, when God looks at you, He doesn’t see your sin, but His Son Jesus’ perfect righteousness covering over you.

One who has that kind of oil of faith, not just on the day they were baptized or the day they were confirmed, but a person who has that oil of faith in their heart and life until their life on this earth comes to an end, they are one

of those who will sit down with the Bridegroom at the eternal wedding banquet of heaven. Jesus tells us here that everyone is responsible for themselves. We can't borrow that oil of faith from Mom or Dad, Grandma or Grandpa or even from our spouse or kids on Judgment Day. Each of us will stand or we will fall with our own faith or lack of it.

Have you checked the oil in your lamp lately? If Jesus comes back today or if you should die before He returns, are you ready for Him? Do you trust that His sacrifice on the cross was *for you*? Have you been reading and taking to heart God's Word regularly? Are you in God's house, as much as you feel you are safely able to be, to worship Him and receive His gifts to strengthen your faith in Him? If you can answer yes to these questions, then know that you are ready!

If for some reason that's not the way you've been treating God's powerful and saving Word and Sacraments, there's no better time to start. Jesus has shown us in this parable what will happen to those who aren't ready when He returns. The door of heaven will be slammed shut forever. Please, don't let this happen to you. Be prepared. Use the tools that God Himself has given you to use, how He works for you in your life, His Word and Sacraments. Take them with belief these will replenish the oil of faith in the lamp of your heart. Be prepared so that when the cry suddenly rings out on the Last Day, "Here's the Bridegroom! Come out to meet Him!" you will be among the wise who joyfully enter into the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb.

Yes, "When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation and take (us) home, what joy shall fill (our) heart(s)! Then (we) shall bow in humble adoration and there proclaim 'My God how great Thou Art!'" (LSB 801:4). Amen.