**Come Out To Meet Him**

**Matthew 25:1-13**

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

The ten virgins are waiting for the bridegroom to come, when they hear the cry “Here is the bridegroom, come out to meet Him.” We know that some had extra oil and some did not. We also know that those who were foolish, who did not have extra oil, went out to get more oil and missed out – for all eternity. We have heard this parable often enough, but this wedding ritual spoken about in our Gospel lesson is a little strange to us, we do not fully grasp what is going on. So, I thought a little enlightenment might be good.

Here are the details of this ancient wedding ritual. Nine months to a year ago, the groom and the bride were betrothed, or engaged. The man proposed marriage to his woman, agreeing to pay her father the customary bride price. Then, having her father’s consent, the bride herself consented to the marriage. Ever since that moment, they have been considered to be husband and wife – for life.

They have not yet lived together, however, for it is not yet the appropriate time. First, the nine-month waiting period must pass. During this time the groom must prepare a home for his bride, while the woman prepares herself for life with her husband. After this allotted time of waiting is over, the groom’s father must ensure that his son has completed all of the necessary preparations. Once his father is satisfied that all things are ready for his new daughter-in-law, he gives permission to his son to go and bring her. It does not matter when the father tells his son that it is time, off he goes, hurrying all the way, to fetch his bride immediately, even if it is in the middle of the night.

Here now comes the responsibility of the virgins. As the bride’s attendants, their task is to watch for the bridegroom and announce his coming to the bride, so that she is dressed to meet him whenever he comes. In case he comes at night, they must have their lamps ready with an ample supply of oil to fuel them all night. Day and night they keep watch, for he is coming at an hour that they do not expect, for no one except the father knows the hour, not even the son.

Now we apply this to Christ’s Church. This is how it will be with the coming of the Bridegroom for His Heavenly Bride. Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom Who will be coming at the end of this world to claim His Holy Bride, His Church, His people – all believers in Christ. The Groom has gone away to prepare a home for His Bride: “In My Father's house are many mansions; . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3).  “But of that day and hour [of His return] no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only,” He says (Matthew 24:36).

Once His Father is satisfied that His Son has finished His work, and that all things are now ready for the Bride, The Father will give His Son authority to go. Off He will go, hurrying all the way, to fetch His Bride immediately, even if it is in the middle of the night.

“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Matthew 25:13). You my friends, are attendants of the Bride. Your attendance at this Church signifies that you are attendants of the Church, and you are charged with the responsibility of helping keep watch for His coming. You do this in order that the Bride, Christ’s church, will be beautifully adorned for Her husband when He comes.

When the cry comes, “Come out to meet Him!” Will you be ready? Will you have the oil necessary to trim your lamps? Faith is required, and that supply of faith is built up through Word and Sacrament.

All the virgins are connected to the church, they hold membership in the church, they are on a church roster somewhere. Some are wise, some are foolish. The wise have their faith fed and nourished regularly – weekly – for they know not the day nor the hour and keep a supply of oil on hand.

The foolish however have seen that the bridegroom is taking a long time coming. They fall asleep secure that they will have time to do what needs to be done to get ready later. The cares of this life overcome them and they slumber unaware. And we all know, that things often happen unexpectedly.

When something comes up, when calamity strikes, then they run off to get some oil to help them through their crisis. Church becomes the place to go when there is a great need, even though they do not normally come through the door. It becomes the “quick fix” place. But when that particular crisis passes, all too many “quick fix” Christians become foolish and complacent again, neglecting the supply of oil. Many a Christian will be surprised to find out that their faith had failed them, they thought they had more time, but alas it will be too late.

On the other hand, there are the wise, they know that the bridegroom could come at any moment. They fall asleep secure, for they have prepared for the unexpected. They have taken care to fill their flasks with oil and are ready for whatever may happen. They regularly have their faith fed and nourished – Word and Sacrament are a part of their weekly disciplines, knowing that these are the things which keep their flasks filled for coming of Christ.

Are you ready for the unexpected? Are your lamps trimmed? Is the supply of oil topped off?

What is strange is that the bridegroom has provided for His bride to be taken care of till He arrives. He has supplied all the oil necessary to meet Him when He returns. It is the Spirit who provides the oil of faith, doing so when we receive the gifts Christ purchased.

You might say, the call goes out each week, “Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.” Wherever His Word is, there Christ is. His gifts prepare you for His return in glory. In Word and Sacrament, the Spirit builds you up in the true faith, filling and trimming your lamps.

The peace that passes all understanding, the oil of gladness, fills the Christian. You and I can boldly claim, “Christ has died for my sins. He comes to me with a Word of forgiveness and nothing of my sin remains. His death, which frees me from my death, I celebrate when I eat of His body and drink and His precious blood – and He fills me with Himself. I can rest in peace, for I am ready for His return to take me home.”

And what a glorious day that will be. No more pain, nor more arthritis, no more cancer, no more aches, nor more sorrow, no more heart disease, or depression, or death. No one will steal from or cheat their neighbor ever again. No one will speak vile or hateful things of another.

These are the things that will be revealed on the last day in God’s children, in those wise attendants found ready – they who have treasured the oil of gladness – the means of grace by which we have forgiveness of sins and are prepared for eternity.

I do not know about you, but I look forward to the day of Christ’s return. It will be glorious indeed to see the travails of this life come to an end and the life of eternal joy begin. I look forward to hear the cry to ring out, “Here comes the bridegroom, come out to meet Him.” Yes, come Lord Jesus, yea, quickly. Amen.