

The Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost
Service of Daily Prayer -- Morning
November 8, 2020

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

P: In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice;

C: **In the morning I prepare a sacrifice for You and watch.**

Psalm 5:3

P: My mouth is filled with Your praise,

C: **and with Your glory all the day.**

Psalm 71:8

P: O Lord, open my lips,

C: **and my mouth will declare Your praise.**

Psalm 51:15

**All: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Scripture Readings

Amos 5:18-24

Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord!

Why would you have the day of the Lord?

It is darkness, and not light,

as if a man fled from a lion,

and a bear met him,

or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall,

and a serpent bit him.

Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light,

and gloom with no brightness in it?

"I hate, I despise your feasts,

and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,

I will not accept them;

and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,

I will not look upon them.

Take away from me the noise of your songs;

to the melody of your harps I will not listen.

But let justice roll down like waters,

and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to

meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Matthew 25:1-13

“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. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. 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. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Hymn: *LSB 516, Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying*



1 “Wake, a - wake, for night is fly - ing,” The watch - men on the
 2 Zi - on hears the watch - men sing - ing, And all her heart with
 3 Now let all the heav’ns a - dore Thee, Let saints and an - gels



heights are cry - ing; “A - wake, Je - ru - sa - lem, a - rise!”
 joy is spring - ing; She wakes, she ris - es from her gloom.
 sing be - fore Thee With harp and cym - bals’ clear - est tone.



Mid - night hears the wel - come voic - es And at the thrill - ing
 For her Lord comes down all - glo - rious, The strong in grace, in
 Of one pearl each shin - ing por - tal, Where, join - ing with the



cry re - joic - es: “Oh, where are ye, ye vir - gins wise?
 truth vic - to - rious; Her star is ris’n, her light is come.
 choir im - mor - tal, We gath - er round Thy ra - diant throne.



The Bride - groom comes, a - wake! Your lamps with glad - ness take!
 Now come, Thou Bless - ed One, Lord Je - sus, God’s own Son,
 No eye has seen the light, No ear has heard the might



Al - le - lu - ia! With brid - al care Your - selves pre - pare
 Hail! Ho - san - na! We en - ter all The wed - ding hall
 Of Thy glo - ry; There - fore will we E - ter - nal - ly



To meet the Bride - groom, who is near.”
 To eat the Sup - per at Thy call.
 Sing hymns of praise and joy to Thee!

Sermon

The Gospel readings for the next three weeks, which takes us up to the end of the church year, are all from Matthew chapter 25; over the course of these three Sundays, we'll read the whole chapter, and look at each teaching. This week and next week, we have two different parables/teachings that concern the same two things: waiting for Christ's return, and what we should be doing in the meantime, while we wait.

Maybe today's teaching about the ten virgins and the wedding feast seems a little hard to relate to at first. It's based around the way wedding customs worked two thousand years ago and an entirely different culture. What's the deal with these ten women hanging around waiting until late at night? What's the deal with the oil and the lamps? I'm not going to go into some kind of historical explanation of all these customs right now, because it's actually not all that important for understanding the point that Jesus is making.

What do we need to take away? There's a bridegroom who is expected to arrive, but they don't know when, and there's this group waiting for him. Some of them are called wise; others are called foolish. The wise ones are welcomed in, while the foolish ones are shut out. And at the very beginning of the passage, Jesus tells us that this teaching is an explanation of some aspect of the kingdom of heaven – in this case, particularly about his second coming. We're drawing near to the end of the church year now, with only three weeks left (including today); the new church year starts in December. And the end of the church year traditionally has this focus on what we might call the "end of the world," speaking about what Scripture does teach concerning the end times and the return of Christ.

The point of the parable is about the arrival of the bridegroom and about how (when he did arrive) some were ready for him and some were not. So the bridegroom is, of course, Jesus himself. Has Jesus been delayed? It doesn't say why the bridegroom was delayed, just that he was. It's more than a little silly to imagine that Jesus got caught in traffic on his way back, or that he was too occupied with other business up in heaven to carry out his second coming promptly. But maybe it feels to us like he's been delayed; we have been waiting for him to return for nearly two thousand years. People keep expecting and keep predicting it, but this and other passages indicate that it will still take many people off guard. Christians are not called to speculate or calculate; rather, to always be ready. "Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour," as Christ says right here. If someone comes along and claims to predict the day, you can safely ignore them on the basis of Scripture.

Why the delay, though? This delay is also a call to repent – the long time in returning is more time for more people to repent and believe. As we endure the trials and tribulations that go along with life here on earth, it might seem hard to look at it like this – we continue to pray, in the words of the saints in Revelation, "How long, O Lord?" But every day Jesus waits is another day for people to repent and believe. We have to remember, as this Matthew 25 text reminds us, someday it is going to be too late. To the five foolish virgins with no oil, the door is shut, and the bridegroom says, "I do not know you."

That's a very scary thought, that someday it will be too late, that there's a possibility of being shut out and hearing that "I do not know you." It's scary enough that I want to be sure I know what

Jesus is talking about in the rest of this, what the deal is with the oil and lamps and all. If I need this oil to be prepared and to be welcomed in at the end, I better figure out what it symbolizes in real life, and be sure to get it now, before it's too late. Apparently this is a common problem, too! There's ten of them waiting, and five of them, half of the total, are included in this "foolish" group who are excluded.

What were the foolish ones thinking? Maybe they didn't think at all – the necessity never even entered their mind. Maybe they planned all along to borrow oil from the others at the last moment. Who knows? There isn't really any good excuse; that's why it's foolish. Apparently each person can get only their own oil – no one can help another person in the final judgment. Now is the time to prepare for eternity, to be watchful and to be prepared for the day Christ returns.

So, what does it mean to "watch and be ready" in terms of the Christian life? What *does* the oil symbolize for us? Like many of Jesus' parables, there is more than one theory or interpretation out there. We could take it as a warning against an attitude of "have fun now, repent later". Maybe it's an encouragement towards doing good and pushing towards sanctification and imitating Christ, as good works are an important part of being a Christian. In Galatians 6, we're encouraged to "not grow weary of doing good."

Certainly that's part of Christian faith. As it is necessary to know that salvation is not by works, it is still important to (as our own Lutheran Confessions say), "to admonish [people] to Christian discipline and good works and remind them how necessary it is that they exercise themselves in good works as a declaration of their faith and in gratitude to God". That's true, yet I think it doesn't quite fit with what the oil is getting at here.

Another approach is that it's not talking about actions, but rather attitudes; not about our hands, but our hearts. Paul puts it pretty strongly in 1 Corinthians 13 when he talks about the central importance of love in the Christian life, going so far as to say it's the most important. Jesus says the same, the night of the Last Supper when he washes his disciples' feet: this command I give you, to love one another. And just before today's reading, in Matthew 24, Jesus warns, "because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold." This Christian love is tied together so strongly with Christian faith: Paul's trio of "faith, hope, and love."

The oil in a lamp is what fuels it, what makes it work in the first place. The oil is what makes the lamp glow warm and bright, just as the love of God in Christ is what fuels us as Christians. In that sense, we'd take it as a warning against having an outward show of faith but being cold and empty on the inside.

One of the early Church Fathers, Augustine, wrote about this parable that the five foolish ones are "lax and unmindful," troubled and distracted by present worldly matters and not focused on the future hope of the resurrection. They do have lamps, and they seem to be waiting for the Lord like the others are – that is, they have outward signs of belief and good works – but they lack the oil, the true and living Christian faith. It's all too easy, when the return of Christ is nothing but a theoretical, distant event, to forget about that and fall into complacency. It's all too easy to come to church week after week and go through the motions, forgetting what it's all about, forgetting the urgency of the Gospel, forgetting to be prepared and watchful as the five wise virgins are.

In the end, the one thing we can conclude with certainty: the oil represents whatever it takes for you to be ready to receive and honor the bridegroom appropriately when he comes in glory.

Repentance and a true, humble faith are key. Perseverance and courage at times; I mentioned that wonderful Finnish word *sisu* a week or two ago, the grit and the guts to be faithful to Scripture alone in the face of worldly opposition. Willingness of suffer for the name of Christ and deny one's self. Sorrow over the world's brokenness and a desire to help those neighbors in need. Any and all of these things could be a part of that oil -- whatever it takes to be ready to receive and honor the King when he comes, that is what this parable should teach us to desire and pursue.

Perhaps it's counter-intuitive, but that's why it's so important that we rely on Christ and not on ourselves. Luther says this about the text: "When the Kingdom is preached, these are the results: Some receive it with all their heart and are serious about it, believe the Word, make the most strenuous efforts to practice good works, let their lamps shine before the world; for they are well provided with lamps and oil, that is, with faith and love: these are represented by the wise virgins.

"Then there are some that also accept the Gospel, but are sleepy, are not serious about it, think they can succeed with their works, are secure, and believe it can be paid for with works; these are indicated in the foolish virgins. In Scripture, those are called foolish that do not obey the Word of God, but follow their own mind, will not be taught, accept no opinion but their own. But it will happen to them at last as it here happened to the foolish virgins. These two kinds of people are in this Kingdom, namely, where the Gospel and the Word of God is preached there should be exercise of faith: some follow, some do not follow."

For those who remain in faith, who are well supplied with oil, with the faith and compassion created and filled up by the Holy Spirit, the unexpected return of Christ holds no fear. Rather, it is a moment of great joy, because we are invited in to the great banquet, the marriage feast – the long time of waiting is over, and the celebration begins. Until we hear that call and see that joy, we wait and watch, and are mindful to prepare ourselves through the means of grace, Word and Sacrament, he has given us to refuel and restore us on our way. Filled up by our Lord's grace, let your light now shine out into the world.

Apostles' Creed

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
Born of the virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
And sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

Prayers

C: Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Prayers for the Church, our community and nation, the sick, etc.

P: Lord God, heavenly Father, send forth Your Son to lead home His bride, the Church, that with all the company of the redeemed we may finally enter into His eternal wedding feast; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

All: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

P: Let us bless the Lord!

C: Thanks be to God!

P: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C: Amen.