SERMON FOR SUNDAY NOVEMBER 8 2026
The 10 Bridesmaids – Matthew 25:1-13

Apparently, the difference between entering the kingdom of heaven and being locked outside is remembering to bring a spare container of oil.

Go to Costco. I'm sure they sell it in bulk.

That is a little unfair to the traditional interpretation of this parable. But only a little. We often reduce this story to a familiar lesson: be prepared. Jesus is coming back, nobody knows when, and we need to be ready. Five bridesmaids plan ahead. Five do not. The prepared enter the wedding banquet, and the unprepared are left outside.

But prepared for what? And what does that preparation look like?

Those questions are important because the story gives us some strange examples to follow. The wise bridesmaids refuse to share. The bridegroom arrives late and then closes the door on people who were waiting for him. Everyone falls asleep, and Jesus concludes by telling his disciples to keep awake.

There is more going on here than a reminder to check our supplies.

And if we finish this parable convinced that Christian faithfulness means securing our own place while leaving everyone else to figure things out for themselves, I think we need to read it again.

Similar to the disciples in the garden when they were waiting for Jesus, the bridesmaids fell asleep as they waited for the bridegroom. At midnight when it was dark, the bridesmaids woke up to the bridegroom and the foolish bridesmaids wanted oil from the wise because they couldn't see and it would be hard to follow. The wise said, "forget it. Get your own. I won't have enough."

As the wise followed the bridegroom were prepare and they were able to stay close and enter the wedding banquet (the kingdom of heaven) – then the doors were shut. When the foolish came to the door they said, 'Lord, lord open to us.' They were greeted with the response, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Then

the bridegroom gives these important instructions, “Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

Many Christians would argue, “okay, we who follow Jesus have nothing to worry about. We’re not the sinners that others are.” But remember, as Luther taught, we are both saint and sinner. So now when you look at the bridesmaids who do you stand with the wise or the foolish?

I think it is important to really understand the instructions to the foolish bridesmaids when they come knocking to get into the banquet, “Keep awake for you neither know the day nor hour he will come.”

Chapter twenty-four, the one just before the parable of the bridesmaids, begins a discourse around eschatology or the coming of the end times. We find the following events: the destruction of the temple is foretold; signs of the end of the age; persecutions are foretold; there will be the coming of the Son of Man; and three parables for the necessity for watchfulness and keeping awake. The instructions in the parable of the 10 bridesmaids is a continuation of the three parables in Chapter 24 about keeping watch.

One of the items that often gets overlooked in this story is the oil. Many would say how can that be so. It was to light the lamps so they could see the bridegroom. That is not the case. The oil is a not a commodity. It is an allegory for life lived by the light of Jesus and his Sermon on the Mount.

The parable of the 10 bridesmaids is not the first time we hear about foolish and wise people in the gospel of Matthew. When placed side by side with the text from Mathew 7:21-27, part of the discourse of the sermon on the mount, the foolish and wise are clarified even more.

The first part of Chapter 7 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and, in your name, perform many miracles?’ 23 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ Who are the foolish? Those who call me Lord, Lord. Who are the wise? Those that do the will of my Father. Sound familiar? The foolish

bridesmaids began their request to the bridegroom with the words “Lord, Lord” connecting them with the foolish in Chapter 7 and the wise did the work of God.

The second part of chapter seven shares a parable, known as the seers and the doers, or wise and foolish builders: Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

In this parable we hear the story of wise and foolish people. Those who hear the words of Jesus and put his words into practice are the wise and those that don’t are foolish. The wise will enter the kingdom of heaven.

As I pointed out earlier the bridesmaids waited for the bridegroom much like the disciples waited for Jesus in the garden. Both groups fell asleep.

Waiting for us is simply the reality of life. Not that we should say, “This is how it is, get over it.” But that what we choose to utter or how we choose to be in the waiting matters. Not necessarily for God, but for ourselves. “Lord, do not delay,” is simultaneously a claim of urgency but also a witness to promise. That is, yes, we want the wait to be over. But, at the same time, we trust that God will show up. God will show up in the midst of any manifestation of our waiting. God will show up to be what we need God to be depending on how we experience the waiting. If our waiting is experienced in fear? God comes with peace. If our waiting is experienced in longing? God arrives with deep and abiding satisfaction. If our waiting is experienced in anticipation? God accompanies us in the joy that should be our present. In the words of Matthew, yes, keep alert. But rather than keep alert for what is to come, keep alert for the ways in which God enters into our present attempts at alertness — and seems to bring exactly what we need. To keep awake does not mean the absence of God. It means to recognize our absolute dependence on the presence of God.
Amen.