

23rd Sunday after Pentecost
November 8, 2020

“Ready or not, here comes the Bridegroom” (Matthew 25:10)
By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the coming Bridegroom. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, saints in Christ, the bride of Christ,
Today’s text for this 23rd Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel reading,
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.”

Here ends our text.

The door was shut. Such finality. The door to heaven will one day close and will never open. This is the one door that you need to be on the inside rather than the outside like the foolish virgins, pounding and pleading “let us in!” For once the door is shut it remains shut forever. Finality! But, for the wise virgins, finally, the eternity of bliss with the Bridegroom begins.

Last week the children sang, “I am Jesus Little Lamb”. The final verse says, “And when our short lives have ended, by His angel host attended. He will fold me to His breast. There within His arms to rest.” There is a finality of this earthly life which ends in rest. The Bible euphemistically describes death as sleep. So, we heard these words from our Epistle, in 1 Thessalonians 4:14.

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”

But there will come an awakening! The end will come finally and the wise virgins, the believers in Christ, will awake. So, we sang just now, “Wake, Awake, for Night is flying”.

The coming of midnight comes quickly when the Lord, the Bridegroom returns! Oh, who will meet Him? So, the first stanza asks this question.

“Oh, where are ye, ye virgins wise?
The Bridegroom comes, awake!
Your lamps with gladness take! Alleluia!”

Finality. Finally. What gladness! What joy! An eternity of bliss begins. And the second stanza continues to describe Zion, the bride’s joy,

“Zion hears the watchmen singing,
And all her heart with joy is springing;
She wakes, she rises from her gloom.
For her Lord comes down all-glorious,
The strong in grace, in truth victorious;

The world in which we live is one of gloom, of sickness, of bitterness, of sin.

This hymn was written in 1598 by a Lutheran pastor, Phillip Nicolai, when the plague was in his hometown of Unna Germany. Have times changed any with the plague we are going through right now? How quickly 400 years have passed since the writing of this hymn. How quickly night has flown. But the words based on our Gospel, 1 Thessalonians 5, and Revelations 21 are timeless. Bach wrote the beautiful music for this hymn in 1731 for the 27th Sunday after Trinity. “Wake, Awake, for Night is flying.”

Quick question... were you awake late into Tuesday night watching the election returns, hoping to know who would be the president for the next four years? And then the counting just stopped. And then it restarted again and still continues today.

Yes, we are in the midst of an imperfect election where there is much acrimony. If there are claims of impropriety and irregularity, then these will be heard, and rightfully so. There will be runoffs, recounts and appeals. Our nation is working to count the votes of the election to try and have some sense of finality. Then, there can be a final certification by the states and hopefully an acceptance of the will of the people...well...for the next 4 years... until we do it all over again.

As Christians, it’s our duty to accept the certified results of the states as imperfectly as they may have been gained. We must honor and pray for our leaders even if they weren’t the ones that we chose. Yes, politics ebbs and flows. Seats are gained. Seats are lost. Administrations enter. Administrations leave. It’s ever changing isn’t it?

Our text speaks of a coming day when there will be no changes, no more appeals, no more waiting, no more gloom. Only finality...but a blissful finality for the wise virgins. For they will be certified as wise virgins, that is, believers in Christ. And unfortunately, there will be a rejection of the foolish for their unbelief.

For Zion, the church, this is the day we have been anticipating all our lives. It is the day when, we the people, we the people of God, “the saints along with the angels gather around the radiant throne” of the Bridegroom, as the third verse of our hymn of the day assure. He is “the Blessed One, the Lord Jesus, our ris’n star, God’s own Son.” What a beautiful hymn this is.

Yes, we hear beautiful secular music like John Phillip Sousa’s “Hail to the Chief” for our earthly imperfect presidents. But in heaven, we will sing “Hail, hosanna” to the King of kings as we “enter the wedding hall to eat the supper at Thy call.”

**“It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.
It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.” (Psalm 118:8-9)**

I. Without faith in the Bridegroom one is not ready to enter heaven

The question before each of us today and every day is always, “Are you ready?” Are you ready to meet the Bridegroom when He comes and enter into the wedding hall with Him? It’s a soul-searching question that asks you whether you put your trust only in the Lord. For if you put your trust in anyone or anything other than the Lord, such as riches, worldly princes, one’s own self-righteousness, you are not ready.

Your lamp is dry and has no oil. You need a lit lamp to meet the Bridegroom.

The oil of the lamp is faith in Jesus. It is graciously given through God’s word.
“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” Romans 10:17.

Now is the time to hear and believe while the word is preached.
As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6,

“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

Luther speaks of the Gospel like a rainstorm which quickly passes over. If one doesn’t heed the word of God at that time, there may not be another rainstorm before the door is shut.

Amos 8 says,

**“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord God,
“That I will send a famine on the land,
Not a famine of bread,
Nor a thirst for water,
But of hearing the words of the Lord.
12 They shall wander from sea to sea,
And from north to east;
They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord, But shall not find it.**

“Ready or not, here I come”. That’s the well-known call of the hide and seek game that children love to play. There’s the countdown that precedes it giving all the children time to hide. When the countdown ends, everyone is still and quiet so that there hiding place is not given away. If you’re not ready, or not quiet, well you’re easily spotted.

God’s word tells us today to be ready for Jesus’ final coming. The countdown has already begun and it’s not a game. There’s a finality of eternity either in heaven or hell.

One difference between the children’s game and Jesus’ return is that we don’t hear or see a countdown. We don’t know exactly when the Bridegroom will come. But He will come whether we are ready or not. And unlike the children’s game where the object is not to be found, believers want to be found. They want to be found ready. They want to be known by the Bridegroom. They want to be on the wedding invitation list and not outside the door banging to get in. Because the door will never be opened. And the voice from inside, the voice of the Bridegroom, Jesus, will say, “I do not know you.”

For where there was no faith, there was no relationship with God. There was no communication of His gifts of forgiveness and salvation. There was no living of this faith with love toward God and neighbor. There was no prayer, praises or thanksgiving to God for His great riches of eternal life by His Son’s poverty of death. And on that last day, it becomes clear who feigned a relationship with God and who trusted in Him.

An unbeliever doesn’t know God. He or she may believe that a God exists, but does not talk to Him as His Father, Abba, daddy. And since, the unbeliever never knew God on earth, God does not recognize him or her at the gates of heaven.

If you are not ready when Jesus comes, there is no longer time to get oil. Now is the time. It is God's will that all people be saved before it's too late as our weekly Bible memory verse in our bulletin says.

“And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:40)

II. With faith in the Bridegroom, one is ready to meet Him

With faith in the Bridegroom, you are indeed ready to meet Jesus when He returns. For God has made you ready. As we heard on Reformation Sunday, it is a gift of God, not of yourselves, lest any man should boast. You are saved by grace through faith in Jesus! (Ephesians 2:8,9)

Jesus has made all the preparations for His wedding by His death on the cross, and resurrection. The wedding supper is ready. He has paid for the sins of all and given you this gift by the power of the Holy Spirit in your baptisms.

The church is called the bride because the believers are made one with Christ through baptism. Paul says in Romans 6.

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,”

Our baptism unites us with Jesus' death so that our sins are buried.

Paul says in Galatians 2.

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

And this life that we live is nearing day by day, closer and closer to the day we all await, the second coming of the Bridegroom. **“Our salvation is nearer than when we first believed”. (Romans 13:11)**

Jesus came to cleanse His church, His bride, when He died for her and now, He comes to take her to heaven. He presents her spotless as Paul says in Ephesians 5.

“that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”

Yes, the wedding feast is ready by the death and resurrection of the Bridegroom. He loved you, His bride, so much that He sacrificed all for you by giving His life. And you are ready by receiving His washing in your baptism.

We will be raised up! We will be united in the likeness of His resurrection! Read the words from our Epistle reading from 1 Thessalonians 4 often for as Paul says, they are of much comfort for you and others.

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

Such finality. Such blissful finality! There'll be no doubt when the Lord returns. There will be nothing inconclusive! The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel. The trumpet of God will sound. The dead will be seen rising from the graves. And then the believers who are still alive will meet the Lord in the air. The Bridegroom will take His bride into heaven for all eternity! So concludes the last stanza of the hymn of the day.

“Where, joining with the choir immortal,
We gather round Thy radiant throne.
No eye has seen the light,
No ear has heard the might (1 Corinthians 2:9)
Of Thy glory;
Therefore, will we Eternally Sing, hymns of praise and joy to Thee!” Amen.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)