

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 24
Saturday, November 11, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, November 12, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

“The Bridegroom is Coming”

Matthew 25:1-13

As God’s baptized children, we like to say that we live in the “now, but not yet” of eternal life. We are already experiencing eternal life now. Death has no power over us. In Baptism, our Old Adam was crucified and buried along with Christ, and we have been raised to a new life in Christ. We have emerged as God’s faithful people and we wait for Christ the Bridegroom to come and be joined with His bride, the Church, for all eternity.

Using that imagery, Jesus tells a parable. Ten young, unmarried girls are waiting for the bridegroom to arrive. Five are wise and bring extra oil; five are foolish and took no oil with them.

If we simply assume the wise to be believers and the foolish to be unbelievers, we miss the point of the parable. It would not be accurate to so easily make that assumption. Jesus is preaching to His Church. He is telling the “foolish” within it to wise up.

The failure of the foolish virgins to bring an extra supply of oil implies that they did not expect to have to wait so long for the bridegroom to appear. We

can argue all day about what the “oil” represents. Is it faith? Is it the Holy Spirit? Is it good works? Or a sanctified life? People have argued and defended all of those possibilities – and many more.

I personally don’t think it matters what the “oil” is, because in this particular parable, Jesus is not trying to teach what faith is, or the difference between faith and unbelief – that is not His point of emphasis. What He does in this parable, without taking anything away from His earlier emphasis on the urgency of being ready for the Last Day, Jesus now shows the other side of the same coin.

Coming to faith will do you no good if you do not stand firm to the end. Coming to faith must be joined together with faithful perseverance in light of the reality that the Bridegroom may be a long time coming – from our perspective. There are a lot of people who have “oil” as long as Jesus fits into their schedule. But if the Bridegroom doesn’t fit into their schedule, the “oil” just runs out.

Our world, and this has infiltrated our churches and our families – our world has reduced God into an impersonal force, with marginal power, whose presence is a matter of convenience, at best. For many, God’s presence is a matter of indifference.

And that is what is at the heart of this parable. The foolish virgins had “oil” so long as the Bridegroom made it convenient for them. But they certainly

weren't going to do anything extra. The irony is that the time of anticipation for the coming of the Bridegroom should be, and is, a time of festive joy. Life in Christ's Church is a time of festive joy. We sing, "This is the Feast of Victory!" This is a foretaste of the Feast to come. The wedding feast before the Bridegroom arrives is still a feast. It is still a place you definitely want to be.

In Jesus' day, the "lamps" that they would use outdoors were more like torches with rags on the end soaked in olive oil. The torches had to be re-oiled about every 15 minutes. The lack of concern demonstrated by these foolish virgins is profound. They came with 15 minutes of light.

But their lack of concern is no more profound than the lack of concern we see in those who are indifferent towards hearing God's Word or receiving the Body and Blood of the Son of God. Again, this is the point of the parable. The Bridegroom is coming, but there are a great many in this world who are completely unprepared. And even worse, a great many don't care that they are unprepared.

In this parable, Jesus is speaking to the Church. I am sure, the foolish virgins, if asked, gladly told people they were going to the wedding – only to be shut out and left in the dark. They were unprepared for when the Bridegroom arrived.

Likewise, there are lots of people, if you ask, who are glad to tell you that

they believe in God and are going to heaven. “Of course, I believe in God.” The follow up question needs to be, “Then why do you treat Him as a matter of indifference? Now, thanks be to God that He is merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love – as Scripture repeatedly says. In last week’s Sunday morning Bible class, we talked about how His mercy and grace are the dominant, primary characteristics of God – much more defining His nature than simply Him being all-powerful.

However, if you truly believe that, out of love for you, this merciful God sent His Son to suffer and die on a cross so that the guilt of your sin is taken away. And if you believe that Christ then rose from the dead, defeated death and Satan, so that you, when you die, will not suffer the fires of hell, but will know the joy of the resurrection for all eternity. If you believe this, why is so little care or concern demonstrated in how you prepare for this reality or in how you acknowledge God for having done this for you?

Treating God as a matter of indifference is a dangerous way to live. Like the virgins in the parable, it is foolish. It is like waiting for the Bridegroom with only 15 minutes of torch light. In both cases, you will end up in the darkness. And the answer from behind the door will be, “I do not know you.”

We do not know the day or hour that this life or this world will end. All we know is that the Bridegroom is coming. Amen.