

The Last Sunday of the Church Year  
St. Matthew 25:1-13: "Come Out to Meet the Bridegroom!"  
November 23/24, 2019 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

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Lord God, heavenly Father, make us watchful and heedful in awaiting the coming of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, that when He shall stand at the door and knock, He may find us not sleeping in carelessness and sin, but awake and rejoicing in His appearance; through the same, Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (ELH, p. 165)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for today is taken from the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

[Jesus said:] "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."<sup>(ESV)</sup>

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who calls us to listen to His voice and follow Him, even though we cannot see Him yet, dear fellow redeemed:

In a few days, joyful processions of people will enter houses all over the country to enjoy Thanksgiving dinner. Similar processions will happen about a month later at Christmastime. Those who are traveling somewhere will be making preparations for the trip. Those who are hosting will be cleaning and cooking in preparation for their guests.

When the day arrives, the hosts get up early to make sure there is enough time to get everything done. So many details! The company will arrive at noon, so everything should be in place by 11:30. It never is. The flurry of activity rolls right up to the expected time. The kitchen is tidied up. Miscellaneous items are thrown in closets and hidden in drawers. Eyes glance out the window looking for the car to pull in the driveway. Then it's 12:05, then 12:15, then 1:00! There are no messages about plans changing. Where could they be?

The main dishes were ready an hour ago, and the smell of food fills the house. Stomachs are rumbling. Thieves—some little and some big—sneak food when mom isn't looking. As the minute hand makes its revolutions, the adrenaline that kept everyone going all morning is wearing off. Arms and legs are weary. The couch in front of the TV feels comfortable, and no one really cares about the football game. Eyes start to feel heavy.

This scenario is something like what Jesus describes before the bridegroom arrives for the wedding feast. Eager to meet the bridegroom and enjoy the feast, the virgins bring their lamps. They talk excitedly with one another. It will be a great celebration, unlike any they had attended before. What would the banquet hall look like? Who would be there? How would everyone be dressed? They couldn't wait to join the wedding party and skip through those doors.

The ten virgins were ready. Their lamps burned brightly. Their ears listened for the announcement of the bridegroom's arrival. Their eyes kept a sharp look-out. But as time passed, the excitement wore off. It was getting late. Why wasn't he here yet? How much longer would it be? As they waited, *"they all became drowsy and slept."*

This is a parable about looking for Jesus' return on the last day. Because we know *"neither the day nor the hour"* of His coming, Jesus tells us to *"watch,"* to be alert, to be ready. What does it mean to stay watchful? It does not mean staring up at the sky every day, waiting for Jesus to come on the clouds. It does not mean lighting a candle or turning a lamp on for Jesus. Being watchful means to have a sober mind alert for any danger. It means to have a clear faith in the Lord's promises and to be ready for Him to come at any moment.

It is hard to stay watchful like this. The longer we have to wait, the more it seems like Jesus will not return in our lifetime. This leads many to set aside spiritual concerns. "There is plenty of time for church later," they think. "And I know where my Bible is when I need it." Nothing could be more foolish! Jesus says, *"[S]tay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.... [B]e ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect"* (Mat. 24:42,44).

But our eyes sometimes get heavy. We believers are represented by the wise virgins in the parable. The wise virgins had plenty of oil at hand; they had the fuel of the Word to keep their faith going. But they became drowsy just like the foolish ones. They slept too. As prepared as you and I may be for our Lord's return, we are still sinners. We are not perfectly watchful. We grow tired of the wait. We wonder if the marriage feast will really be worth it.

And then there is the pressure from the world. The world mocks the pure in faith, just as it mocks the 20-year-old who leads "a chaste and decent life," a sexually pure life (6<sup>th</sup> Commandment). The world wants us to abandon the holy Bridegroom and search for other lovers. "Look at how much fun we are having! Why sit there in the darkness with your little lamp? Who knows if your Lord is even coming? Just come over here for a while! You'll be back before you know it!" Every one of us knows these temptations. Every one of us has fallen for them. Those are the times when we set the lamp of faith aside. Those are the times when we slept.

But the midnight cry wakes us from this slumber. The Word pierces through our spiritual darkness: *"Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!"* The same powerful Word of Christ that

will wake the dead on the last day wakes us up even now. Our five senses cannot perceive how fiercely the devil and demons are attacking our faith. Our reason cannot keep us on the right path. Only the Word can help us. Only the Word can save us.

The Word gives us Jesus: *"Here is the bridegroom!"* it says. "Here He is lying in a manger. Here He is teaching, healing, and praying for His people. Here He is suffering for sinners. Here He is dying on the cross. Here He is overwhelming the powers of darkness. Here He is overcoming death. Here He is giving life to the world. Here He is shining grace into darkened hearts. Here He is offering His body and blood for sinners to eat and drink."

The Bridegroom's presence with you now is preparing you for His presence eternally. The Divine Service each week is something like a wedding rehearsal. It is where you practice for the marriage feast in heaven. But a rehearsal is only a dim reflection of the real thing. No one here is dressed like they will be in eternity. No one is perfectly focused. No one grasps the full import of the main event. We members of the wedding party are distracted by many things.

But Jesus is still in our midst. He is still calling us to meet Him at the altar. There, He promises His undying love for us. There, He fills us with the sweetest food and drink that we could ever consume. The holy Supper of His body and blood is a gift for the members of the wedding party. It is not for just anyone who comes in off the street. It is for those whose connection to the Bridegroom has been recognized.

Maybe the stranger sitting over by himself is a friend of the Bridegroom. The only way to find out is to talk with that person. "Who are you? Where are you from? How do you know the Bridegroom?" These are the questions we ask of all who wish to partake of the Lord's Supper. We are diligent about this because we want all who partake at the altar to partake of the feast in heaven. We want all who eat and drink here to eat and drink there.

Many do not get this connection. They do not recognize that our Communion practice has eternal implications. Some view the Supper as nothing more than a meal to remember Jesus by. Others use this meal to show how inclusive they are, and they welcome anyone and everyone to join them at the Communion rail. They are not worried about where the people around them are heading. They probably assume everyone is going to heaven.

Jesus does not agree. He said that the virgins who were not prepared, whose lamps had run out of oil, were not welcome to enter the marriage hall. They pleaded for entrance, but the Bridegroom said, *"Truly, I say to you, I do not know you."* The wise and foolish virgins looked no different in appearance. No one could tell them apart until the lamps of the foolish ones began to go out.

But the wise virgins prepared for the marriage feast by giving attention to important things beforehand. They did not "throw caution to the wind." They were not reckless with their lamps and the oil that fed them. They took God's Word and Sacraments seriously. They recognized that only this fuel could keep their faith alive and strong, so they were ready for the Bridegroom's arrival.

It is through these means of grace that Jesus comes to us now. He comes to us to keep us alert and ready for His visible return. He meets us here to prepare us to enter eternity with Him. Paul paints a beautiful picture of what Christ's presence means for us now. He writes, *"But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere"* (2Co. 2:14). Jesus leads the way, and all His people follow along. They are a band of misfits, unimpressive to the world, hardly noticeable in their own right. But because they are joined to Christ, they spread the sweet fragrance of salvation wherever they go.

Paul continues, *"For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing"* (v. 15). This wedding procession led by Jesus winds its way through this world. By the devil's tempting, some step away from the procession into the darkness. But by God's grace, many more are awakened through the sweet sound and fragrance of the Gospel, and they join the procession.

You are part of this procession by faith in Jesus. Each day of your life is a step closer to the doors of the banquet hall. They are standing wide open for you. Your name is on the guest list. The feast is ready. It may feel like a long wait, like when you wait for guests to arrive at Thanksgiving. But when your Savior comes on the last day, you won't care how long His arrival seemed to take. You will rejoice that He has come, and you will go with Him to the feast, the place of perfect happiness and endless joy.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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