

The Last Sunday of the Church Year – Pr. Faugstad sermon  
St. Matthew 25:1-13: “We Are Called out of Darkness to Light.”  
November 20/21, 2021 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

+ + +

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.)*

---

*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.” (ESV)

---

*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 be alert and watchful, so that the day of His return does not surprise us like a thief in the night (1Th. 5:4), dear fellow redeemed:

In about a month, we are going to hear many references to a virgin—the virgin Mary. The reason Mary’s sexual history is so crucial to the account of Christmas is because a baby conceived in the natural way could never be the Savior of the world. Such a baby would be a mere mortal descended from sinful, mortal parents. The baby Jesus had to be conceived by God the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary’s womb, so that He could be born without sin. Then He could be our Savior, and He is.

The virgins that Jesus describes in today’s parable are virgins of a different sort. They are called virgins because of their spiritual purity, a purity they received by faith. These ten virgins “*took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.*” The bridegroom is Jesus, who will come in glory on the last day to raise all the dead. When He comes to raise and glorify the bodies of all the faithful, they will go up with Him to the great wedding feast in heaven.

The ten virgins were all looking for the bridegroom's return, but we're told that five of them were foolish. They did not take along extra oil for their lamps. They thought the bridegroom would be coming much sooner than He did. They weren't prepared for the long wait. This waiting period is where we are today. Is the wait getting too long for you? Are you becoming drowsy?

It is easy to get that way. When you are well-rested and the sun is shining, it is not difficult to stay on the alert, watching for someone's arrival. It's different when you are weary and tired, and the darkness of night covers everything. Then the eyes droop and the head gets heavy, and before you know it, you are sleeping. How do we keep the lamp of our faith burning? How do we stay watchful and vigilant?

The oil for our lamps comes from God, and it comes in rich supply. The oil is His powerful Gospel found in His Word and Sacraments. The Gospel is what keeps the faith of the Christian burning brightly. Our faith holds onto Jesus. When we hear again and again what He has done for us, that His righteousness is ours, and that His grace and forgiveness and life are freely given to us, our faith gets stronger.

The continued hearing of His Word means we will not be tricked when a deceptive voice calls for our attention. We know the voice of our Good Shepherd. The continued eating of His body and drinking of His blood keeps us healthy and strong. It keeps us from desiring to fill ourselves with rotten food and poisoned drink. We meet the bridegroom now in His means of grace where He promises to be found, so that we are prepared to meet Him when He comes on the last day.

But some who once were eager to meet the bridegroom are not eager any longer. They once had lamps of faith burning brightly. But now their lamps have gone out—or they are about to—because they are no longer connected to the fuel of the Gospel. Their eyes have grown accustomed to the darkness. They are not looking for the light anymore.

We can all think of people like this, fellow Christians who used to join us here at church but who don't anymore. We do not give up on these people whom we love. We pray for them, and we take whatever opportunities we can to encourage them. We want their faith to burn brightly again. We want them to be prepared for their Savior's return.

Those whose lamps have gone out are a warning to us. We were once all together, redeemed by the blood of Jesus, spiritually pure in God's sight. We were the same—saved by grace alone and not because of anything in us. But the devil, the world, and our own flesh are constantly working to steal this salvation and our confidence in Christ away from us. The apostle Paul expressed this concern to the Christians in Corinth. *"I betrothed you to one husband,"* he wrote, *"to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ"* (2Co. 11:2-3).

What are the things that lead our thoughts astray? What tempts us to forsake the light and the warmth of Jesus' Word and Sacraments? What tempts us are the works of darkness. They are all

the things that the powers of darkness promote, which God warns us about. What God wants for us is exactly opposite of what the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh want.

God wants us to have eternal life in heaven. Our enemies want us to look for heaven on earth. God wants to forgive our sins. Our enemies want us to forget about our sins. God wants us to do what benefits our neighbor and honors Him. Our enemies want us to do what pleases ourselves. God wants to save us from eternal death. Our enemies want us to live for today and today only. God wants us to follow His Word. Our enemies want us to follow our hearts, follow the crowd – anything that keeps us comfortable with the world.

The powers of darkness are persuasive. Jesus says that even the wise virgins *“became drowsy and slept.”* We are more vulnerable than we realize. It wasn’t long after Jesus told this parable that He asked Peter, James, and John to remain with Him and watch with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. As Jesus prayed, the disciples fell asleep. He woke them up and said, *“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Mat. 26:41).

The same goes for us. Our spirit indeed is willing—here we are, eager to be strengthened through Jesus’ Word and Sacraments. But our flesh is weak. We will be tempted again to sin. We will set aside the lamp of faith to try to keep our sin hidden. We will think we can dabble in the darkness and still be ready when the bridegroom comes. We think we can make some compromises now. We think we can do what we know is wrong, because there will be time to right our wrongs later.

The bridegroom came when He was not expected. He came at midnight. The virgins were not watching for Him. We should never put off repentance for our sins until tomorrow. If we know what we are doing is wrong, we must repent of it today. There might not be a tomorrow! Jesus says, *“For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God”* (Joh. 3:20-21).

Where the bridegroom is, there is light. Jesus is the Light that shines in the darkness that the darkness cannot overcome (Joh. 1:5). He said about Himself, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”* (Joh. 8:12). The virgins in today’s parable are not ones who have never sinned. They are ones who were called *“out of darkness into his marvelous light”* (1Pe. 2:9).

The *“marvelous light”* of Jesus is His great love for our dying world. In this great love, He came into the world’s darkness. He came to take all our sins to Himself as though they were His own. He was the beacon light that caused the devil, the wicked world, and death to take aim at Him. They threw everything they had at Him, but they could not defeat Him. He overcame them all on the cross and rose from the dead in total victory.

The light of Jesus’ grace, the light of His forgiveness, the light of His life, was stronger than all the powers of darkness. He shines that bright light inside us through His powerful Word. He opens our eyes to the works of darkness. He shows us where we have let the darkness creep in,

where we have become drowsy. He leads us to repent of our sins and to see that they have all been dispelled by the light of His salvation.

His glorious light keeps your light burning. On your own, you would have no light. But the light of His Gospel has touched the wick of your heart and set it on fire. Your heart is not shrouded in darkness anymore. It is bathed in light. You are born again. You have left the dark womb of the world and entered into the brightness of His kingdom.

As long as you keep your eyes on your Savior's light burning brightly in His Word and Sacraments, you will be ready for His return on the last day. Well supplied by His means of grace, your faith will be shining when the cry goes out, *"Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!"* Then you and all the faithful – all the wise virgins – will go with your bridegroom Jesus to the marriage feast.

Then there will be no sorrow or concern over His delay, no memory of our troubled time in the darkness. There will be only singing and feasting and joy in our Lord's kingdom of eternal light.

*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.*

+ + +