

The Last Sunday of the Church Year – Pr. Faugstad sermon  
St. Matthew 25:1-13: “Ready! Set! Wait...”  
November 25/26, 2023 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

+ + +

We thank You, Lord God, heavenly Father, that in the past church year You have preserved Your Word among us in purity and by it effectively enlivened our souls; and we humbly ask You, graciously to forgive us all our neglect, unbelief, and disobedience with respect to Your Word, and continue [to bestow upon] us this precious treasure with Your blessing forevermore; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 181)

*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 has not delayed His return due to disinterest or other distractions but out of patience and love for you and all sinners, so there is time for us to repent (2Pe. 3:9), dear fellow redeemed:

One of the most exciting moments in sports across the board, is the moment just before the action begins. At that moment, anything is possible. The kicker starts his approach to the ball, the referee throws the basketball into the air at center court, the pitcher on the mound begins his windup. But where this moment is most intense is on a racetrack.

The runners are called to the starting line: “On your mark!” They jump up and down a few times and shake their arms. They crouch down and dig their feet into the blocks. They carefully plant their fingers behind the line. Then silence. The anticipation builds. Hearts beat faster. You can hear a pin drop. “Set!” Backs raise, legs straighten, muscle power pushes down to the toes to

provide the catapult forward. The runners have to be especially careful right now. This is the time when many get disqualified. They can't wait. The pop of the gun seems to take forever.

If you remember being in races as a kid, this was the toughest part. *"On your mark! Get set!"* Sometimes your parent or your coach would hold off on the *"Go!"* longer than usual. They wanted to teach you discipline. You have to be patient. If a sibling or friend started the race slow like this, they just wanted to see you suffer. You can picture it now: kids anticipating the call and leaning forward, then flailing their arms and falling in a heap on the ground. It's so hard to wait for that *"Go!"* while staying ready to explode off the blocks.

That sort of waiting is what we find in today's reading. Jesus shared this parable with His disciples to teach them and us how to prepare for His return. He speaks about ten virgins who went out to meet the bridegroom in order to join him at the wedding feast. Their description as *"virgins"* indicates that they were pure in faith, holy by virtue of their connection with the bridegroom.

It is a picture of the righteousness you have because you are united with Jesus. It is a strange reversal. A virgin who joins bodily with another is no longer a virgin. But we whose bodies are joined through Baptism with Jesus' holy body, change from ones who are sinful and guilty to those who are clean and pure. Paul described this change in his letter to the Corinthian Christians. He wrote, *"I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ"* (2Co. 11:2).

That is stunning language! Paul was writing at a time that was much like ours, with a culture just as much focused on personal pleasure and sexual permissiveness as ours is. Many of the people who had joined those congregations organized by Paul were ashamed of the things they had done in their past. They wished they could go back and undo what they had done, but they couldn't.

Paul directed them to the work of Jesus to save them. After listing sins that keep people out of the kingdom of God, sins like sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, greed, and drunkenness, Paul acknowledged the reality, *"And such were some of you."* Christians are not those who are unstained by sin. Some have sinned so much, that they might think it is impossible for their many sins to be forgiven. Then Paul continued with this comfort: *"And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God"* (1Co. 6:11).

You know the sins of your past. You wish you could go back and change a lot of things. But even if you did that, you would still be a sinner. You could change your actions in certain situations, you might be able to avoid some things, but other temptations would have come up. You weren't just a bad choice or two away from perfection, you were far from it.

But in Jesus, you are holy. You were baptized into His victory over sin. Although you were impure, you have become pure. Although you were guilty, you have been absolved. Although you were dead in your sins, you have become alive in Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. He cleansed you and all the members of His church, as Ephesians says, *"by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle"*

*or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:26-27).* That is a description of you, a virgin holding a lamp of faith, called out of the darkness to meet your Bridegroom.

So you are ready, but are you set? All ten virgins were ready at first, but only half of them were actually set. I’ll tell you what being set does not mean. It does not mean being able to say that you were baptized and confirmed in the church, or that you have been a member here your whole life. It does not even mean that you regularly go to church and contribute to the church’s work. Those things do not ensure that you are set.

The important thing is that the flame of your faith is being fueled. Going through the motions or keeping your name on a membership list does not fuel your faith. But humbly repenting of your sin, eagerly hearing the pure Word of God, and receiving the Sacraments—that does fuel your faith.

All Christians must take this seriously. Just because you once had faith, does not mean you will always have faith. The five foolish virgins took their faith for granted, and when the Bridegroom was delayed, they became weary. They did not prioritize fuel for their faith, and when they realized their error, it was too late. The door to the wedding banquet was shut, and they weren’t allowed in.

This is a powerful warning for us. You couldn’t tell the difference between the wise and foolish virgins by looking at them. But there certainly was a difference. At one point, they all had their eye on the finish line; they were all ready to go. But not all of them were set. They relaxed too much. They took their eye off the prize. They became disqualified. They did not finish the race.

And notice that in fact all the virgins—all ten of them—relaxed too much. *“They all became drowsy and slept.”* The gun did not go off fast enough for them. And here we are, still waiting. The Bridegroom called us out of the darkness into His marvelous light (1Pe. 2:9). The midnight cry has gone out, *“Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.”* But He has yet to return.

So what are we supposed to do? Jesus says, *“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”* But how do we watch? We watch by keeping our eyes on the Leader of the race, the Man standing ahead at the finish line. He has been in our shoes. He knows the difficulties and challenges we face. But He never slowed down. He never changed course. He never took His eyes off the prize, not even when the whole world stood against Him, not even when they nailed Him to a cross to suffer and die.

The author of Hebrews writes, *“[F]or the joy that was set before him [Jesus] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).* He endured that for you. He kept going, moving forward, for you. The Bridegroom knew what He was competing for; it was for you, His bride, His Church. The course He took was hard, harder than we can imagine, but He finished in victory. He won the victory over sin, devil, and death for you.

You stay ready and set by keeping your eyes on Him, your Savior. You watch for His return by listening to His promises. He speaks them to you today. He is not far away from you. He is present through His Word and His Sacraments to give you His encouragement and strength.

He speaks His forgiveness as oil for your faith to keep it burning strong. He gives you His grace when you grow weary and drowsy along the way. He blesses you with His unseen presence now, so that you are prepared to rise up and go when He comes in glory.

That time is approaching and coming soon. The midnight cry was no false alarm. Now is the time to be ready for the Bridegroom's return. We don't know if His return will be sooner or later, so we stay set, alert, watchful, by continuing to fuel our faith through the powerful means that God has given us. We wait with patience for that day when a sharp sound will pierce the air, like a bullet from a gun.

Jesus will come *"with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God"* (1Th. 4:16). And if we are no longer living here on earth, if we are sleeping the sleep of death, that sharp sound will awaken us. Then we will surge with power out of the tomb, up into the sky, and directly to our Lord.

That's the day that we will *"Go!"* Until then, we stay **Ready**, we get **Set**, and with the help that God provides, we **Wait**.

*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.*

+ + +