

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of November 9, 2008

Are You Ready for the Lord's Coming? (Matthew 25:1-13)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 25th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew:

"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."

This is the text.

Dear friends in Christ, Relationships can be complicated. Your relationship with God is a complex relationship. There are many ways of looking at it. Through Christ you are called God's beloved child and God is called your dear Father. Jesus is your brother and Saviour and Lord all rolled into one. You are called sheep and He is your Shepherd. The Bible also describes our relationship with God in terms of a marriage. A few Sundays ago we had the text about the parable of the wedding banquet in Matthew's Gospel; in other places in Scripture the Lord describes Himself as a Husband to His church, as a Groom to His bride. Today our text also involves a wedding. This as a picture of His relationship with His church; it is more so a picture of His sudden return on the Last Day.

Friends, the old Boy Scout motto applies here. That motto says "Be prepared". This parable is about being prepared. Now when we think about a wedding what comes to mind? Normally we think of it as a grand celebration of love between a man and a woman that God has joined together as one. Behind this ceremony, which is usually quite brief, there is a great deal of planning and preparation: Invitations are sent, wedding clothes are bought, there are often bridesmaids, groomsmen, each with specific duties, there's a minister who prepares the service, there are rings that are exchanged, there are the decorations, there is the reception meal, and so on. We saw all these things in the wonderful wedding that was held here last week.

In our text we see a different kind of wedding format. The parable describes a procession that would take place after the wedding ceremony in Biblical times. This was a procession from the place of the wedding to the place of the reception feast. The procession in the parable took place at night. The text mentions 10 virgins. These were young women who were part of the wedding party. Since it was night time they had torches to light their way. They were waiting for the groom to join them in the procession to the feast. But for one reason or another, the groom in the parable was delayed and the women fell asleep. Then at midnight, at an unexpected time the groom finally came. There was great excitement.

But there was one problem. Five of the women had not brought any oil so they could not keep their torches burning. They asked the other five women for oil but they had none to spare. As a result, the five who had no oil had to go buy some oil at the last minute only to find that they it was too late. The door was shut. They had missed the feast.

This parable is about not waiting 'till it's too late to be right with God. The Bible tells us no one knows the day or the hour of Christ's coming. He will come like a thief in the night, suddenly, unexpectedly. The first time Jesus came was to redeem the world. He did this on the cross when He died for our sins. When He returns He will come as Judge. Are you ready? Now is the time.

I once had a roommate in university who was quite eccentric. He used to stay up nights programming computers, working on various electronic projects and tinkering with things. During the day he would sleep through his classes. He was very intelligent and thought he could get by on his natural aptitude. When it came time for the final exam for his statistics math course he decided it was finally time to learn the entire semester's work the day before the exam. He studied hard that day but it was too late. Inevitably he failed the course. He was not prepared.

Friends, we cannot cram for Judgement Day. We cannot suddenly follow Christ when He returns. Then it will be too late. On that day you do not want to hear the words, "I say to you, I do not know you. Depart from Me." Heaven and hell are real places. Heaven is the place of life and light and love and peace in the Lord. Hell is the place of eternal death and darkness and torment with no rest, with no hope, in complete separation from God's goodness. Do you know Jesus? Now is the time. Be prepared for His return. It is coming when you least expect it.

The end of the world may be a thousand years away, it may be tomorrow; it may be this afternoon. You might live to be 100; you might not live another year, you might not live until tomorrow. We simply do not know when our time will come. One thing is sure though, as Romans 13 says, "Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed". We must be prepared.

So how do we get ready? How do we prepare for the Day of our Lord? In the parable the wise ones carried oil to keep their lamps lit. The oil here represents faith and the life of faith and good works that flows out of that faith. Where do we get this precious oil?

We find it in the life-giving and life-sustaining Word of God. As Jesus says in John 6, "My words and spirit and they are life". They are the words of eternal life. Jesus comes to us in His Word and Sacraments. He offers forgiveness and eternal life through these free gifts. He makes us alive. He changes us and gives hope and purpose in His service.

Friends, there is a crisis among Christians today. It is a crisis about the Bible. We often say lofty, high sounding things about the Word but we do not live immersed in it. How is it that some who confess faith in Christ don't grow much in faith or love even after years in the church? The problem lies in the listening. An hour of church a week is not

enough. How healthy would we be if we ate only once a week? It is the same with our spiritual life. We need to chew on God's Word every day, many times a day.

Thinking about the Scriptures throughout the day, reading the Word, perhaps beginning with a chapter or two a day along with a devotion such as portals of prayer is a wonderfully edifying, life-building habit. His Word then begins to take deeper root in our lives. Our attitudes begin to change and we seek to apply it to our lives. Our thoughts then begin to focus more on what God wants and not so much on what we want.

It has transforming power. It changes our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh. It transforms apathy to zeal. It changes fear into faith.

When we spend time with Jesus in His Word His love for us and His sacrifice for us become more precious to us. We begin to see that reading the Bible isn't about gathering facts and getting smarter. It's about clinging to Jesus as Saviour.

So that by the Holy Spirit's power we may look forward to the Groom's arrival, to Christ's Second Coming with anticipation. The Word prepares you. It equips you for every good work in this life here and now in your place of work and in your home. It has the power to keep your lamp lit, to fan the flame of your faith and bring you to the glorious Heavenly Feast. Amen. Go in peace; serve the Lord. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.