

The Last Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Matthew 25:1-13
November 26th, 2017
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church
Greenville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

At Midnight a Cry Was Heard

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

“The Kingdom of Heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the Bridegroom.” With these words our Lord establishes the beginning of the parable which is a warning to all those within the Church of God. This Gospel from the Evangelist St. Matthew connects the Gospel from last week with the Gospel for next week. Last week we heard the parable of the sheep and the goats; how the sheep—those who belong to the Lord God—were separated from the goats—those who are outside of the Church. Today, there is also a separation recorded for us, only this time the separation happens with those within the visible Church of God. This separation happens between wise and foolish virgins, ten in all, who await the coming of our Lord and Savior. Next week, the Lord will come to us riding on a donkey, triumphantly, as he approaches the city of Jerusalem. Today, our Lord, the Bridegroom, comes at midnight to open up the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem—the New Jerusalem spoken of by the prophet Isaiah—for those who have kept their lamps trimmed with the Word of God.

Therefore, today’s Gospel connects the end of the Church Year with the beginning of the Church Year—today being the last Sunday of the Church Year. Our Lord, therefore, tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, the Christian Church on Earth, made up of all those who believe on the Lord + Jesus Christ, is like ten virgins. Two things must be noted about this: First, there are *ten* virgins. Ten is the number of complete perfection. Our Lord is telling us therefore, that these virgins represent the complete number of those within the Church of God. The second thing to note is that they are called *virgins*. Virgins are a symbol of purity, innocence, that is, they are without the stain of sin. In other words, these virgins represent the baptized—those whose sins have been washed away in the waters of Holy Baptism, and have put on the righteousness of Christ.

However, we are told that there are five wise and five foolish virgins. This is why this parable is a warning to all those within the Church, or even who claim to be within the Church, for within the Church of God there are those who are only members of it in name. Therefore, we should examine what makes a virgin—a baptized believer in Christ—a wise or foolish virgin, in order to do that we must look at their similarities and differences.

They are similar in these ways: They are both virgins; they both have lamps; they both go out to meet the bridegroom; and they both, while waiting for the Bridegroom, slumbered and slept. Their virginity, as was stated before, represents the righteousness given them in Holy Baptism. The lamps

that they carry represent the Word of God, and the faith and gladness that comes from hearing the Word of God. This is taught us by the psalmist who sings about being anointed with the “*oil of gladness*.” The fact that they both go to meet the Bridegroom, reveals that they both came to the house of God to meet the Lord + Jesus in His Word and Sacrament. That they both slumbered and slept is a reference to their death; sleeping the sleep of death, until the Lord should return again to make all things new.

Since these are all things that we do we should be sufficiently be alarmed. For the heart having heard these words immediately asks, “Which type of virgin am I?” So to ease our worry, let us examine how the wise and foolish virgins are different. And it is in only one thing: the foolish virgins did not bring extra oil with them in their vessels. In other words, they did not have a sufficient amount of the Word of God, meaning they were like many in the Church of God today, who are only Christians on Sunday. The rest of the time they do not pray; they do not read the Holy Scriptures; they do not attend Bible study; if there are worship services held during the week, they do not attend; they do not talk about the Lord + Jesus nor what He has done for them in their daily lives with those whom they know in their daily lives; they do not confess their sins to God on a daily basis, nor do they speak about forgiveness (or, if they do, it is only to excuse manifestly impenitent sinners from having to repent of their sins, so that they can go on living their openly sinful lives); they do not live their lives (when they are not in Church) as if they were Christians. In short, they are hypocrites. They only give the impression that they are Christians when it is convenient for them to do so. But our Lord does not judge as the world judges; He judges the heart, whether or not it has faith.

The saddest part about the foolish virgins is that they are not aware that they are so; just like last week with the goats, who did not realize that they were goats. The foolish virgins do not realize how foolish they are. Therefore, at midnight, when all are asleep and the world is not paying attention, and no one is prepared, the Bridegroom comes with the shout, “*Behold, the Bridegroom is coming; go out to meet Him!*” And the five wise and five foolish virgins all arise and trim their lamps to go to meet Him. It is only now that the five foolish virgins realize that they are insufficient in the faith and good works that is supplied by the receiving of God’s Word. So, they ask for the help of the five wise virgins. But none is going to be supplied by them, for each one must give an account of their own actions. The five wise virgins cannot stand as intercessors for the five foolish virgins, for we have only one Mediator and Intercessor, and that is our Lord + Jesus Christ, Who fulfilled the Law perfectly for us, having come down out of Heaven to bear our flesh and be our brother; and Who suffered and died in our place on the tree of the Cross.

Christ’s works is the only thing that will make one sufficient towards salvation. Not our works, not how much we believe, not even our feelings or emotions, but only our faith in what our Lord has done for us through His grace. Only our trust in what our Lord has done for us is going to save us. And this is only taught to us through the holy Word of God—the Holy Ghost working through that Word to create, strengthen and sustain our faith in our Lord’s works. This is why we must come often to this holy house to receive God’s Word and participate in His sacraments: in order that He might open our ears to His gifts. It is why we must continually be in His Word daily; daily confessing our sins, and rising again as a new creation before God’s eyes. This is why we pray daily, both morning and evening, and throughout the day. It is why we attend Bible study and study the confessions and the catechism, both here in church and at home with our families, so that our lamps may continue to be trimmed and full of oil. And, it is why we must repent of the times when we act like the hypocritical foolish virgins in our daily lives, who are only Christians when at Church, or around other Christians.

This is the Church’s task until the Bridegroom comes again, to supply the oil of gladness—the oil of faith which comes through the Word of God. And it is every Christian’s duty to gladly and willing hear the Word of God, and not despise it or reject it by only using it on Sundays. For we know neither the day nor the hour when the Bridegroom will come and call us to the great eternal wedding feast in

Heaven. In the Gospel the cry comes at midnight, when everybody is asleep and people are normally not ready to receive guests. Therefore, we must always be ready; always keep our lamps trimmed. And we can do that by coming together for worship.

For, the Church is wherever the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and wherever the Sacraments are administered rightly according to Christ's institution and are continually being given out as oil for the lamps of those two or three who are gathered together in Christ's Name. You need to do nothing to obtain it. All you need to do is receive it from those who give it. You cannot buy this, like the foolish virgins tried to do in the parable. This is how we observe the Lord's command to "*watch*" for it is in being diligent in our hearing and receiving of God's Word that we are kept alert; that we are made ready for that Day when our Lord returns. We do not know when our Lord will return. We do not even know the day when we will fall asleep in our Lord—the day of our death. We are only told it will come at midnight, that is, when we are unprepared. Therefore, we must be prepared as we can be, by doing what the blessed Apostle St. Paul says to the Church of Thessalonica: we must put "*on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.*"

These are all gifts of our Lord through His Holy Ghost. Therefore, let us come to this holy house, and receive the Word of God through preaching and the sacraments, and thereby receive the Holy Ghost, so that He might anoint us with the oil of gladness, and our faith may be strengthened, and our love for God and for our fellowman may be increased, and we may have hope in our salvation. Then, when we hear the cry at midnight, "*Behold, the Bridegroom is coming; go out to meet Him!*" We will be ready and alert, with our lamps trimmed with the Light of Christ, and our vessels filled with the oil of faith in our Lord and Savior. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.