

**Prayer of the Day:**

Almighty God and Savior, you have set the final day and hour when we shall be delivered from this world of sin and death. Keep us ever watchful for the coming of your Son that we may sit with him and all your holy ones at the marriage feast in heaven; through Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

**Verse of the Day:**

Alleluia. They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple. Alleluia. (Revelation 7:15a cf. NIV)

**Sermon Text:**

The scene is not uncommon. A group of young children scatter in every direction as one chosen child stands with eyes covered counting loudly for all to hear. After the correct amount of time is up the cry rings out, "Ready or not, here I come!" Hide and seek may be losing ground to apps and virtual reality but I think it's still common in the "real world" play of every child at some point in their lives.

As I read our Gospel lesson this week, I couldn't help but think of this classic as our ten ladies waiting for the approaching bridegroom are alerted by the cry, "*Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!*" But today this is no game and the consequences of poor preparation are far worse than being "it". So **READY OR NOT, HERE HE COMES!**

Various commentators make much about the lamps and the ritual of waiting for the bridegroom. While it's all interesting speculation it bears little meaning on the parable itself. What we need to know is supplied for us. Ten virgins, bridesmaids, as we call them today are waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom before entering the wedding banquet. As was apparently customary, they would greet the groom with oil burning lamps and approach the house in a kind of festival procession. Think the announcement of the arrival of the wedding party in our day but with torches and a bit more formalism than frivolity. Of the ten ladies, we are told five were foolish because they chose not to bring extra oil for their lamps. The other five were wise having decided to bring extra in jars should the wait require more.

**Gospel Lesson: Matthew 25: 1-13**

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. <sup>4</sup> The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. <sup>6</sup> "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' <sup>7</sup> "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' <sup>9</sup> " 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' <sup>10</sup> "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. <sup>11</sup> "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' <sup>12</sup> "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' <sup>13</sup> "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour. – NIV84

God's Word assists us greatly as we begin to think this all through. The Psalmist in Psalm 119 tells us, "*Your Word (God's word) is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path (v105).*" All ten are members of the wedding party. But all ten are not full of the "*light of the Gospel of the Glory of Christ (1 Corinthians 4:4 [cf. also 4:6]).*" Five figured position was enough to get the job done and felt no need to keep their lamps full.

Of course, as we heard the lesson read, the Bridegroom takes longer than expected. As a result all ten fall asleep as the watch. This is significant as well. We might be tempted to begin to think our preparation is the key to our place in heaven. Nothing could be farther from the truth. All ten show their weakness for the task at hand as the watchfulness of all are found wanting. Does this sound familiar?

Satan hates the light and wants all to be darkness. He gathers everything he can to pull our attention from the eager anticipation of faith for the return of her only Savior. He uses the world around us to entice us into the slumber of materialism, the frenzy of busy schedules and the lure of worldly pleasure. He finds a friend in our own sinful natures which seek after the ease of laziness over the hard work of the inward watching our Savior seeks.

But there is hope. At midnight the cry rang out: *'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'* The bridesmaids rise from their slumber. All ten awake and turn to their lamps it is time to trim them in the last preparation for the Bridegroom. But a problem is immediately evident.

Our foolish bridesmaids panic. "*Give us some of your oil our; lamps are going out.*" It seems like a reasonable request. But it is not. This parable is all about personal preparation. Each individual Christians watchfulness as they wait for the return of the Judge as we heard of last week. I cannot believe for another, truthfully, I can't even do that for myself. It is a gift given to each by God. Should we squander it we begin to look like the seed Jesus talked about which sprouted on rocky soil, quickly burning up its fuel but without roots, without being grounded in the Word, there was nothing left and the plant is scorched in the heat of the Sun, in the trial and tribulation of the world (cf. Matthew 13). Though they may well have wished they were able the 5 wise bridesmaids must look to their compatriots and speak the terrible truth. *'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'*

Ah, but we know the sad truth to don't we. At midnight, the shops are all closed and when the call comes the Bridegroom is at hand. There is no time. "*But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.*"<sup>11</sup> "*Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!'*"<sup>12</sup> "*But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'*"<sup>13</sup> "*Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.*

This doesn't sound so triumphant, as we celebrate Saints Triumphant Sunday. Nor is it meant to be. It is instead a warning to all who would rest on their laurels. Who think they have done enough, or who have claimed a place of honor high enough. Surely, because I have membership in a church, because I'm a nice person, because I identify with those who call themselves Christian my place is secure on the last day. Christ will know my name for I am enough, my deeds are enough, my ancestry is enough. Our Savior cuts through all of it as He looks at those whose spiritual apathy has cost them everything, "*I tell you the truth, I don't know you.*"

But then I said earlier that there was hope. Not my strength, my name, my place in the world, but the light of the glory of the Gospel of Christ. Why was the Bridegroom so long in coming? What was He doing? Matthew 25 will soon give way to chapters 26, 27 and 28. Plots, Gethsemane, Sanhedrin, Herod, Pilate, the Cross. In all of it, Jesus' preparation was faultless, as He wins our salvation, as He fills our lamps full with the knowledge of Him, His work, His forgiveness. As we wait here in this sin filled world, He continues to send His Spirit through His Word and Sacraments until the full number of the elect stand ready with jars full of faith, full of grace, expecting their God. Paul speaks this way as he asks, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless* (Ephesians 5:25-27)."

This is you and me by the grace of our God, listening (to the Word), partaking (of the Supper), remembering (our Baptisms). God prepares us for the day that the call rings out, **READY OR NOT, HERE GOD COMES**. These truths change our perspective in this parable. No longer numbered among the foolish in our sin we stand ready and waiting. We join the joyful procession with lamps burning from the truth regularly tended by the Holy Spirit. The doors will not be locked on us. Our Bridegroom knows our name, for we are not merely bridesmaids, but members of the Bride, the Church of God, elect and glorious washed clean in the blood of the Lamb, kept in the faith by the faithful and powerful Word.

Oh, we may fall asleep. Death may force our eyes closed for a time in this world. Sin and Satan will try to drown us in drowsiness but the Words of our Second lesson promise hope. <sup>13</sup> *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.* <sup>14</sup> *We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.* <sup>15</sup> *According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.* <sup>16</sup> *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.* <sup>17</sup> *After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.* <sup>18</sup> *Therefore encourage each other with these words* (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Brothers and sisters, for over 2000 years we have been scattered. At times we have been forced into hiding, persecuted and downtrodden. At times we may even wonder if God stands in the middle of the mayhem and has his hands over His eyes. But when the correct time has come, the cry will be heard! **READY OR NOT HERE GOD COMES!** By God's grace we are made ready in the Word, faithfully watching in the power of Christ's forgiveness purchased on the cross, perfect in the preparation of our Substitute, our Bridegroom, Triumphant in His resurrection. Lamps lit we yearn for the day when we hear it, *'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!* Amen!