

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 Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 24:42

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

Sermon Text:

I am not a patient man. I try and I think I've gotten better as years go by but the long and short of it is that patience is not one of my strong suits. It's bad enough that if a line is more than a few people deep, I struggle to get in it and if I know I'm going somewhere where lines will be commonplace, like a fair or some larger event, well I have to mentally prepare myself for the fact that lines and waiting are the norm for the day. Yes, for me Tom Petty hits the nail on the head and the WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART.

Perhaps that's why the parable of the ten virgins and the wedding banquet has always resonated with me. Christianity, at least as it relates to our Savior's return to judge the living and the dead, well it seems to be all about waiting and patience and it might just be this parable that helps us get in the right headspace to do it. As we dig into our Savior's Words then, let's begin by noticing some similarities between our ladies. All ten of them are to attend the Bridegroom as He comes. They know He is coming. They stand lamps lit and in hand awaiting His arrival.

All ten of them also fail as they wait. When the Groom doesn't immediately appear they get distracted and drowsy and sleep overtakes them. Each one requires the herald's cry to awaken them. All of them must scramble as the groom appears to prepare their lamps to join in the wedding procession and attend the wedding celebration.

Do you notice any similarities between these virgins and the visible churches here on earth? We are all gathered here today. We know, through our education in Lutheran School, Sunday School, Catechism Classes, Bible Study, and the regular rotation of our church year that our Lord will return. God's Word is held before us as we stand in joyful expectation of this return. Look around and despite some physical distinctions most of us would reckon ourselves to be among those virgins that stood ready, properly prepared for our God and His great Day of Judgment. The lamps of faith are lit ... burning brightly ... or so we think.

Still, as often as we like to believe we are okay and ready as we peer into the mirror of the law. As we stand waiting for this great day and years pass by we often find ourselves in slumber. This sin or that leaves us apathetic and tired and our sinful eyelids droop. None of us is the perfect paragon of patience and as we slumber, the lamps of faith grow dim. Waiting has a way of doing this. Trouble, hardship, greed, just the weariness that can come as we follow after Christ and so often, see a world that doesn't and yet, seems to have more fun and easier times, Yes, from time to time, it requires the announcement of God's messengers to wake us from slumber and stand us in the watchfulness of repentance once more.

Now also notice the differences. Five of our virgins are foolish and five of them are wise. Let's first examine the wise. Even though these virgins slept upon being awakened they trim their lamps and replenish their oil. These ladies knew the value of preparation and planning ahead. They kept their eyes focused forward and were able to weather even the failure of slumber as they waited for the Groom.

The foolish are altogether different. Having fallen asleep, lamps burning brightly, they wake to different circumstances. Lamps trimmed there is no oil to replenish them. They frantically search out more but

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. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. ⁶ "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' ⁷ "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' ⁹ "'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.' ¹⁰ "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. ¹¹ "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' ¹² "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' ¹³ "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

unfortunately, there is none to be had and as they hurry about they miss the Groom altogether and are locked out of the wedding celebration. Left in the dark there is only misery as they realize far too late their failure to be prepared has come at a dreadful cost.

Again, we see similarities. The visible church on earth is full of those who also feel confident in their preparation. How many have spent hours paging over our finances in the last few months trying to prepare for fiscal realities and yet have failed to set foot in Bible study here at church? How many finished Catechism class and figured that having studied the commandments, the Apostles Creed, and the Lord's Prayer we stood ready and our Scriptural education was complete? How many will chase after the overtime pay at work or the extra relaxation on the weekend instead of replenishing our oil and refreshing our sin-burdened souls through Word and Sacrament? Yes, as Christians we physically gather together to encourage and be encouraged. We quickly view the differences in these virgins and decide that we are the five wise instead of the fools. But the truth is far more sobering. When we rely on ourselves for our preparation, when the world fools us into believing that saved solely by Christ, our lives lived in Him and for Him don't matter, it is then that we are in danger of falling asleep. When we wake, what will we find: extra oil supplied by the Holy Spirit through the means He has promised or dim wicks only moments from dying altogether? For the foolish, waiting isn't the hardest part for faith extinguished the doors are locked and there is only the weeping and gnashing of teeth of hell.

I know that this message can cause a bit of panic within us. It can leave us feeling a little like those virgins arisen by the shouts of an approaching bridegroom and finding that they were not prepared any longer as they had once been. But dear brothers and sisters, fellow Christians, notice what the wise do. They do not panic. They do not scurry about. They go to their cans of oil. Recall that oil is often a picture of the blessings of our God more specifically the work of the Holy Spirit through His means of grace.

It was not the actions of these ladies that made them the five wise virgins. Their actions were only visible signs of the wisdom that was at work within their heads and hearts. Because they consciously looked forward, they stood prepared. Because they understood the importance of the task at hand they remained ready. In wisdom, because they trusted that the Bridegroom was coming regardless of the wait, they remained vigilant. In this condition, they were able to weather even the storms of life that left others decimated and in despair. Even when sin caused slumber, this handful awoke ready for the challenge while the others were left devoid of hope.

Now another question is burning in our minds, "How is this wisdom acquired?" Don't look to yourself or others! When we rely on ourselves, we awake in a scramble to prepare. If we are not focused on the coming Groom and the unknown nature of His arrival, we will not be ready. When the five virgins attempted to scramble after the fact, they were met only with the words of the others, we cannot share. There is only enough for our lamps. Faith comes not from others but from God, through the means He has promised.

That's right, faith is the wisdom that makes all the difference. Solomon reveals this wisdom to us as he says "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom* (Proverbs 9:10)." Paul also talked about this wisdom that leads us to wait a few Sundays ago as he said, *But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope* (Galatians 5:5). If we spend our lives setting God aside for the world and its comforts, we might awake to the realization that God treated us as we were treating Him and in judgment there are no second chances.

This faith is also the reason that our lesson is not all doom and gloom. There is also hope. As we focus on faith, the importance of God's Gospel message is emphasized all over again. Yes, we all fail, we all slumber, we all sin snoring so loudly as to offend our God in heaven. Yet our Savior took on flesh, stood vigilant in every moment of life, never closing His eyes in the apathy of sin but willingly shut them in death as He became the perfect sacrifice for our sins and His resurrection, well, it provides the triumph doesn't it, as it promises that because He has risen our enemies are defeated and heaven is our home forever. This wisdom, this faith is yours and mine as the oil of the gospel, administered to us by God Himself in Word and Sacrament, gives and strengthens it.

This message is everything. Confident that our Savior is returning for us we stand with eyes focused on the future. In love, we eagerly await God's arrival announcing the triumph of His arrival. Trusting in His promise of everlasting life and knowing of His promised return and His desire to find our lamps burning, we remain in His Word not because it earns us something but because it is the means through which God supplies vigilance and strength. It fills lamp and can, body and soul to overflowing.

Dear friends, may we stand prepared and ready as we await the arrival of our Savior. May we stand prepared not by our work or labor, our wisdom or worth, but in the faith God alone gives and which He strengthens and fills through His Means of Grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. Then and only then will we find ourselves standing among *The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet*. Yes, for them and for us all God grant that the waiting would be the hardest part as our lamps shine brightly into eternity. Amen!