



Pastor Gwen's Message
 Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids
 Sunday November 8, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Our Gospel for this morning is the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids. It is the 2nd of 4 parables that Jesus tells us in what is often called the Judgment Discourse. It comes at the end of Jesus' ministry as He is on his way to the cross. In Matthew's Gospel it appears in Chapters 23 and 25. The 3rd and 4th of the parables in this section will come as our reading for next week and the following Sunday respectively. They all are dealing with eschatology or end times and the Parousia, the second coming of Christ. This will end our church year as Christ the King Sunday, emphasizing the importance of being ready for Christ, upon His final return. So our lesson for today is targeting the importance of being prepared for Christ's return.

Jesus begins with the statement, "The kingdom of heaven will be like this". It will be like this parable of ten bridesmaids. Actually, this teaching is again more of an allegory, rather than a true parable. The bridesmaids are the church that is waiting for the Second Coming. The bridegroom is of course Christ. The wedding feast is the joyous occasion where Christ comes for his church. It is often referred to as the marriage supper of the Lamb. The delay of the bridegroom coming corresponds to the delayed Second Coming. His arrival is then the Second Coming itself. And the closing of the door to the wedding banquet is final judgment. So where are we in this story? Are we the wise bridesmaids or the foolish ones? How do we tell the difference today?

In our story the bridegroom's arrival is not a scheduled event. No one has any idea when he will arrive. And of course the bridesmaids had to be ready so they would not be caught off guard. It was their job, so to speak, to light the way for the bridegroom. And the wise women had plenty of oil as they waited for his arrival. The foolish ladies, not so much. They were not prepared and when their lamps went out, they were left in the dark, out in the cold. And it is the reserve oil of the wise bridesmaids that I would like to talk about this morning. How do we get enough oil? How can we be prepared for the unexpected? What do we need to do to be prepared at a moment's notice to handle not only daily activities but crises in life, as well? What does it take to be prepared for when our faith is put to the test?

Well, to me, the first objective here is to expect the unexpected. We all know how unpredictable life can be. Back in March we all guessed that this pandemic would surely be over by June or July. Hugh. In fact Tuesday this week, I told a girlfriend that things were fine in the Downing household. No sooner did I say those words and the dog got sick all

over his cage. Rodney cleaned the crate out. I got up and got some rice and chicken boiling cause poor Gunny was certainly going to be hungry. Do we call the vet or wait? I went to work and left poor Rodney home to deal with the mess!

A great example in our lifetime that accents the unexpected was 9/11. We all remember the day clearly, but who ever would have thought such terrorism would come to our shores, right under our noses. It interrupted everything. At that time the stock market was soaring. American was not at war and peace was invading our lives. Kids were back in school, the Packers were playing football and fall was in the air. And then the unexpected, terrorist attacks. I am sure you remember vividly where you were and what you were doing when you first heard about the plane crash at the World Trade Center. American was under attack. And the fall out continues to this day. We are still not too friendly with Iraq and there are still screening checks before you can get on an airplane. "Homeland security" is now part of our vocabulary.

And so what do we learn from such things. We learn that we need to expect the unexpected. Tragedy strikes like a thief in the night, so be prepared.

The second thing we can learn from this parable or allegory is to stay in shape. Train for the next crisis. I don't mean training like our military does to defend our country. Nor do I mean train like police officers and fire fighters and EMT that need to not only know their jobs but to stay fit physically to do them. Their strength and skills could be tested at any time.

For you and for me, we need to stay in shape spiritually. If our faith is tested, will it be strong enough to respond to a crisis, as Jesus would want us to. If a crisis comes we have to be "fit" in our faith and have plenty of oil ready.

Did any of you watch the Packer game on last Sunday? It was a disaster and as I was feeling for the Pack, I wondered how much their lack of preseason games and two-a-days was catching up with them. Of course Rodney said it was just that the officials were against Green Bay. Preparation is important no matter what in life you are doing.

Musicians practice and rehearse just like athletes. And if you want to do anything well, you need to practice and stay in shape. Our faith is no different. Developing strong faith takes time. It does not come overnight, but rather by doing things or staying in shape with the Lord.

I always will remember the marks of discipleship I was taught at St Olaf: Pray, Worship, read the Bible, Give, Encourage others, and serve. They are wonderful ways for us to keep our faith in shape. And probably the most important one of all is pray. You cannot be friends with someone if you do not have conversations with them. A good relationship with God is the same. You must pray, talk to God; share your thoughts and concerns with Him.

Remember prayer does not have to be formal or fancy. Sometimes I do think we make it too complicated or too contrived. Just let God know how you are feeling. Short and sweet

is my motto. Be yourself. God loves you just the way you are and He always wants to hear from you.

And I think that being on good speaking terms with God will help when you get into those tight situations, when something unexpected comes your way.

Also for me Scripture reading is a necessity. It is how I feel close to God. Those words on the pages of my Bible are God's words to me. And when life gets messy, I can remember, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want" (Psalm 23). Or "Come to me and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11). Or "Do not worry but strive for the kingdom of God" (Matthew Ch 6). Or "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live" (John Ch 11) And lest we forget, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life".

In God's word there is comfort and reassurance that the crisis will end and that God walks with us always. We just need to keep the faith. Keep the oil in our lamps. Keep the wicks trimmed and we will be fit to one-day stand before the Lord in judgment.

And just like the 5 wise bridesmaids they could not share their oil with the foolish ones. No because they did not want too but because our faith is very personal. It is individual, and no one can do it for you. I sometimes wish I could make others grow spiritually. Some people need more spoon-feeding than others. Boy do I wish it was as easy as changing the oil in my car every 3000 miles. Drain out the old sinful self and pour in a spirit like the one Jesus has.

But it is a fact, that I cannot give my oil to another. I can pray and preach, but you know the old adage, that you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make them drink.

This is exactly why you or we, I include myself too; need to continue to grow in our spiritual journey. We need to "stay in shape" if you will by cultivating our discipleship of the Christian life. There are no shortcuts. We need to read Scripture, pray, worship, give, encourage and serve. Lots of ways for us to grow our faith and develop a healthy relationship with God. And if you keep fit, you will always have your lamp of faith that will burn brightly throughout the darkest hour. **AMEN**