**11/12/23**

**Prepared, Ready, & The Golden Rule**

**Matthew 25:1-13**

“Almighty and ever-living God, we give you thanks for all who have served and defended our country and the values of freedom and justice we hold so dear. Help us be mindful of the sacrifices they made and the hardship endured by their families and friends, so that we never take for granted the privileges they have secured for us. Hear us, we pray, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.”** (PBAS, p. 66) (2)

It is simply amazing how Gospel Readings happen to be so timely every now and then. I come off of the very first marriage that I have had to officiate within the Lutheran Church. There were several ups and downs, and there were several changes. Even including one of the Bridesmaids, the Maid of Honor, as she was unfortunately sick and hospitalized. The Mother of the Bride was tagged in and became the third Bridesmaid, and was actually the Maid of Honor. How cool is that? A lifelong of love, care, service, and commitment to her daughter; and she is there by her side as the Maid of Honor. Prayers also go out to the original Maid of Honor for healing and recovery. We also come off of yesterday being one of remembrance, respect, and thankfulness. We do indeed thank those Veterans that have served and defended our country. We appreciate all the sacrifices, known and unknown, so that they could provide each and every one of us the continued privileges of comfort and freedom. I know for certain when I had to register through the Selective Service System when I turned 18 years-old I was deathly afraid that there might be a draft and I would get called. I admit that I had no desire then, and still have no desire now, to touch a gun or learn any hand-to-hand combat, I barely can fly on a plane as a passenger let alone operate it, and I know for certain I could not live on or serve off of a boat. With that being said, I am not only thankful, I am definitely grateful and respect all those that have served in any way or fashion in any branch of service.

So, you might be scratching your head, or wondering where I might be going with this. Yes, I indeed wanted to focus on our Veterans. However, as a traditional focus of today’s Gospel Reading, and as a matter of fact the one that I followed six years ago when I preached on this very topic, preparedness or being ready are the call. I am 100% certain that each and every Veteran has gotten that drilled into their heads time and time again. I am quite certain that being prepared and being ready almost have become more of a lifestyle than an act or a principle. With this being said I also have strong and resonating memories of the very need to be Ready, as this was taught through my Christian Boy Scout Group, the Royal Rangers. As a matter of fact, that was our very Motto, “Ready!” That would be Ready for anything! Ready to work, play, serve, worship, live, and obey God’s Word. We even had a Code stating that a Royal Ranger is Alert, Clean, Honest, Courageous, Loyal, Courteous, Obedient, and Spiritual. We were also taught the Golden Rule, “In everything do to others what you would have them do to you.” (Matthew 7:12) (3) We even recited our Pledge at each meeting… With God’s help, I will do my best, to serve God, my church, and my fellowman; to live by the Ranger Code; to make the Golden Rule my daily rule. So, as Veterans have been shaped for service, I was also shaped through various teachings and ethics through my childhood and upbringing for life.

I do indeed believe that these very teachings and mindset might have helped those five bridesmaids that fell short. However, I also know it would have helped those five bridesmaids that were indeed prepared and had the blessing and opportunity to enter the banquet. So, here indeed is the ugh huh or quizzical moment of the day. Not only do we need to be prepared or ready, but we also need to be helpful and willing to share in the small and big things of life.

We come to learn and hear in our Gospel Reading today that all ten bridesmaids actually fell asleep while waiting for the bridegroom. Not a single one of them managed to stay awake eager in anticipation! Furthermore, we learn that they did not even plan or prepare enough to have a single one of them be a lookout for all the others. Does that remind you of a similar story? Do you recall when those foolish disciples could not stay awake, or keep watch, when they were with Jesus at the Mount of Olives at the Garden of Gethsemane? Twice, Jesus had to wake them and remind them to pray so that they would not fall into temptation. As they were blessed to have Jesus wake them and give them instruction, we hear that the bridesmaids were blessed that there was a shout from the heavens, or I mean from who knows where, as unfortunately that detail was left out of our Gospel Reading today. The bridesmaids all heard their wake-up call, and their very call into action, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ (1) Startled out of their slumber they woke up and realized that a good deal of time had passed. Luckily, five of them were able to re-trim their lamps, and refill them with the spare oil they had brought. They were indeed prepared and ready! Now, for the other five of them, unfortunately way too much time had passed, and they were not going to have enough supply of oil to keep their lamps burning. In a panic they asked the other bridesmaids for a little bit of their oil, they asked them to share, to show some help and some compassion. Well, that was not happening here! Everyone was fending for themselves! I mean I really can picture the five bridesmaids that were prepared shaking their heads, and going on muttering how foolish the other five were. Unfortunately, that is exactly how we act as a society at times too. Yes, even us Christians sitting in these very pews, those of you sitting on your chairs or couches at home on the conference call, me standing up here talking with you this morning, and all those Christians out there in the streets and our communities as well. You may be sitting there and shaking your head, and thinking, “nope, not me.” Well, let me tell you something, neither you or I are perfect, and whether we realize it, or admit to it or not, we have all been in the shoes of the prepared and ready five as well as the unprepared and unready five several times throughout our lives. Unfortunately, we have not learned or exhibited the very actions from the very Golden Rule I spoke about earlier. So, let’s revisit this very teaching and guidance that we receive from Matthew chapter 7 verse 12 that reminds and instructs us that, “In everything do to others what you would have them do to you.” The five prepared bridesmaids did not share with the other five, and they probably scoffed at them. Not a very Christian like response, right? Well, the five unprepared bridesmaids, along with being unprepared, probably got mad at the other five for them not sharing, and they probably said some not so nice things about them in response as well. Again, not a very Christian like response there either, correct?

Let us also not forget to explore the closed and locked door. This door indeed is a symbol, or a metaphor. Just think here, “what if the characters that the church should identify with are not the bridesmaids but instead is the groom who does not open the door?” The bridesmaids have knocked, are searching, and are asking. Who then is at the door to allow or bar those from entering? It’s Peter, (representing the Church), who is behind the door. While Jesus is speaking widely to the religious authorities, Peter is in his midst listening to it all, with the keys of the kingdom in his hand. And the double cherry on top, as the foolish bridesmaids ask to come in, the bridegroom responds, “Truly I tell you, I do not know you.” In Matthew 26:70, 72, 74, when Peter is questioned if he is a disciple, he denies Jesus three times saying, “I do not know the man.” In rejecting the bridesmaids who are asking and in need, the bridegroom (Peter, the Church) is rejecting Jesus who is knocking on the other side of the door.” (4) Those points are very easy to miss if we solely focus on the bridesmaids, and whether they are prepared or ready or not. Let us not have such a closed-minded focus when we explore the Word each and every day. There are so many stories and teachings tucked away into each Gospel Reading and Lesson.

We are constantly reminded that we do not know the day or the hour, and we are called to be ready and prepared. We are not to be foolish and sit on our laurels, but to continue to be ready and prepare and share with others. After all, a party is so much better when all of us are there together and get to rejoice and have fun with one another. So, we continually need to grow and explore and share each and every day. We need to care for and love one another. We want to enjoy the banquet, and we do not want anyone to miss out!

“Another response to this parable should be this prayer: Lord, use me to help my neighbor. Help me to bring the oil of faith into their hearts. Look how many people there are around us who care nothing about Christ. There are others who have lamps, that is, they have the outward symbols of faith – they worship occasionally, they profess to be Christians, but their lifestyle consistently says otherwise, and there’s no repentance for it. Give me the wisdom to talk to them as Jesus would talk to them. If nothing else, help me present this parable to them for consideration. Help me to pray for them and to be an example to them. Our goal as Christians is to be disciples and to help others become disciples. Our focus is continually on the return of the bridegroom – Jesus and our readiness to meet Him. We look forward to the banquet that He has prepared, and we want to bring as many with us to that feast as God would allow.” (5)

Amen.

**References**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

 Preaching

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 November 12th, 2023

 24th Sunday After Pentecost

(2) Evangelical Lutheran Worship

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(3) Bible.com

(4) SermonCentral.com

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 Introduction and Traditional Interpretation

 Matthew 25:1-13 (24th Sunday after Pentecost)

 November 12, 2023

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(5) SermonCentral.com

 Are You Ready?

 Contributed by Michael Walther on May 24, 2011

 Scripture: Matthew 25:1-13

 Denomination: Lutheran

**Matthew 25:1-13**

 Today the prophet Amos calls for justice to roll down like waters. Paul urges us to

 encourage one another with the promised coming of the Lord. Jesus tells the

 parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids. Surrounded by the faithful of every

 time and place, we celebrate Christ’s coming in our midst in the word of life and

 the feast of victory—the marriage feast of the lamb.

 Jesus tells a parable about his own second coming, emphasizing the need for

 readiness at all times.

 [Jesus said to the disciples:] 1“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten

 bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2Five of them

 were foolish, and five were wise. 3When the foolish took their lamps, they took no

 oil with them; 4but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5As the bridegroom

 was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. 6But at midnight there was a

 shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ 7Then all those

 bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. 8The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give

 us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 9But the wise replied, ‘No! there

 will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy

 some for yourselves.’ 10And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and

 those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was

 shut. 11Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’

 12But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ 13Keep awake therefore, for

 you know neither the day nor the hour.”