

**Last Sunday of the Church Year: November 21, 2021**

**“Failing Folly of Foolishly Fooling Fools”**

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

On this Last Sunday of the Church Year, we hear the Lord speak through the Prophet Isaiah, “*Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. <sup>18</sup>But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. <sup>19</sup>I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.*”<sup>1</sup>

With this picture in mind, Jesus says, “*Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.*”<sup>2</sup> So far so good, right? Sounds like a great time, and who doesn’t like times such as these? But then, Jesus continues, “*Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.*”<sup>3</sup> Oops, now we have to pay attention a little bit.

The Old Testament is pretty clear about the meaning of foolish. Throughout the Psalms and the works of Solomon, the words fool and foolish are synonyms for “sin,” “heathen,” “unbeliever,” and “enemy of God.” Proverbs 1:7 reads, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*”<sup>4</sup> Jesus has already taught on foolishness in the Gospel of Matthew, “*Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.*”<sup>5</sup> The foolish hear wisdom, hear truth, and reject it for shaky, manmade wisdom. It may seem to work for a time, but they are ill-prepared for eternity.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 65:17–19

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 25:1

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 25:2

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 1:7

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 7:26

This is what King Solomon means. They don't despise all kinds of wisdom, just the wisdom of God. The fools love earthly wisdom and instruction. They despise the Word of God, the wisdom and instruction of the Lord, because they do not fear Him—they do not believe in Him.

The opposite of the foolish are the wise. They are often called righteous or faithful, and these two groups are all of mankind. There are foolish and there are wise, and they don't get along. The foolish don't just reject the wisdom of God, they take it out on His people. They hate the righteous. Psalm 37 says, "***The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice.*** <sup>31</sup> ***The law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip.*** <sup>32</sup> ***The wicked watches for the righteous and seeks to put him to death.***"<sup>6</sup>

This we see highlighted with the 10 Virgins. When the foolish find themselves not prepared, they demand the oil of the wise. In their earthly wisdom, the foolish live with a bloated sense of entitlement; everyone must cater to their whims and bend to their will. The righteous are those whom God declares righteous in Jesus Christ. From that mouth comes true wisdom—the confession of faith.

When Jesus tells His disciples a parable about five wise and five foolish virgins about the final judgment during Holy Week, they understand the two groups—there is one who believes and one group who doesn't believe. The difference between the two groups is not found in their outward appearance, because they all bring lamps; nor is the difference in association, because they are all virgins. Jesus' point of comparison is the oil or the lack thereof. The comparison is that on the last day, when Christ comes again in judgement, the wise have faith and the foolish do not have faith.

First-century lamps weren't made to be transported with much oil in them. So when Jesus says, "When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them," His point is, their lamps would have been completely useless—lamps don't burn without oil; and therefore it was utterly foolish to bring them at all, if they weren't going to bring oil.

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<sup>6</sup> Psalm 37:30–32

They either didn't think there was a Bridegroom to go out and meet, or they could bully the wise for their own benefit, or they thought they could meet the Bridegroom on their own terms *even if* He came. Jesus is showing the utter foolishness of sin and unbelief. Unbelief in the Bridegroom is as nonsensical as bringing a lamp with no oil.

In our own lives, with the aid of the Ten Commandments, we see a foolishness that dwells in us. It's not a mental problem. It's not a matter of not being smart enough. It's a spiritual problem. In our minds, we know we shouldn't yell and scream and lose our tempers at our spouse or our children. We know that won't help the situation. We know it won't bring about happiness. But we are overcome by our passions and give into our temptation to make ourselves feel better, and we act like fools.

In a very logical way, we know that lusting after someone or taking something that doesn't belong to us will not make us happy in the end. We know it's wrong. We know in our minds (even if in the dark recesses of our minds) that a moment's sinful pleasure will only bring pain for us and for our loved ones. We know that gossiping about someone behind their back is harmful to their reputation and divides even those of the household of faith, but we give into the guilty pleasure of a juicy story or an uncharitable tale.

Holding a grudge is stupid. Refusing to forgive is a sin. These are all things that we know intellectually. But sin is not rational. It doesn't make any sense. It can't be explained. It can't be educated, it must be exposed and confessed with contrite hearts.

Notice that the five wise virgins are not distinguished from the five foolish by how often they refrained from sinning. They are distinguished by what they thought of their sins. The faithful, the five wise, those who believe in the Lord Jesus, those who are baptized and worship God where He is found, you, see your sins and lament. You confess your sins and want to do better. You confess your sins and believe that Jesus can and does forgive them. That trust in Christ's atoning sacrifice is the oil of faith. Your faith, not your ability to refrain from sin, is why you will one day enter into the marriage feast with your Bridegroom. This is the comfort of today's parable.



If you are prone to doubt your faith, which oddly enough is a mark of someone who is truly faithful, then listen carefully. The part of the parable that we sometimes cringe at because it doesn't appear to be nice, is actually for your comfort. When the foolish realize that their lamps are going out, they demand the wise for oil. When the wise refuse, it's not proper to see this as stinginess. That's not Jesus' point. It's not a parable about sharing. The wise refuse, because it's not theirs to give. It's not their own possession. It was given to them by "the dealers."

The foolish know who the dealers are, but during their life, they refused to go and obtain. They refused the places where faith was dispensed, and rejected those who sought to strengthen true faith. They wanted to do what they wanted to do, and that did not include reception of Christ's Holy gifts; instead, they engaged in a willful rejection of the Gospel.

Your faith is not your own. You have received it. The Lord Jesus sent His Holy Spirit into this world to work through Holy Baptism, through the preached Word, and through the Sacrament of the Altar to distribute forgiveness which gives and builds faith. It is through these holy means the Holy Spirit works to call, gather, enlighten, sanctify, and keep; both the wise and foolish know this. Only the foolish don't believe it, and therefore don't think they need it.

The wise know the places to find this holy commodity is only within the Christian Church, and the dispensers of His means of grace are servants of the Word, whom are regarded, "*as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.*"<sup>7</sup> This is where oil is received in this life.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is of great comfort. This means that you are not burdened with converting the foolish of this world in order to prove yourself to be a true Christian. You are not responsible for someone else's salvation. No one is going to hell because of what you did or didn't do or because of what you did or didn't say. *That includes people within your own household.*

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:1

Many err today by trying to usurp what alone belongs to God—conversion. To be sure, the Lord may very well be using you to convert others by what you do or say in your proper vocations (that’s how He works), but the work is solely His—the responsibility His. You sin in these vocations, yes, but your sin does not keep anyone out of heaven. God is more powerful than your sin. He works even despite your sin.

Being a Christian, being wise, doesn’t mean fulfilling your vocation perfectly; rather, it is being contrite and confessing your sins against your vocation. It is recognition and repentance of sin. It is fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things, including your sin – that makes the angels in heaven rejoice.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, if your faith does not spring from within you, if it truly is a gift from God, as the Bible says, then the lies of the devil that cause you to doubt your salvation are exposed by the light of the truth of God. Exposed to that everlasting light, they are proven false. Remember, the devil, the world, and your sinful nature do not want you to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come, but God’s will is done when He breaks and hinders their evil plan and purpose and when He strengthens and keeps you firm in His Word and faith until you die.

He is the originator, the creator, the giver, AND He is the maintainer, the keeper, the sustainer, of your faith. He gives it to you based solely upon Christ’s all-atonement sacrifice on the cross. Having a contrite heart, you do not add to or subtract from your salvation, nor could you. You are in the Christian Church because He brought you in. You remain in the Christian Church because He keeps you in the one, true faith.

This parable is one of comfort to the faithful and one of urgency for those outside the faith. Jesus says, “***Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.***”<sup>8</sup> You don’t know when the Bridegroom will arrive. He will come unexpectedly, at the time of His perfect choosing. He will come at a time that is advantageous to you and to all believers. While you wait, you rest in confidence, you sleep in peace, in Christ’s holy congregation.

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 25:13

During this time of gracious delay, you live in the Kingdom of Grace, and gather to be fed with His Word around His pulpit and with His body and blood around His altar. You are not yet free from sin, but by His grace, one day you will be.

He is coming, *“And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”*<sup>9</sup>

When the announcement comes, you will trim your lamps with the oil of faith and go to His Holy mountain, to the wedding banquet of heaven that He has prepared for you. Wisdom knows all about this mountain.

*“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples  
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,  
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.*

<sup>7</sup> *And he will swallow up on this mountain  
the covering that is cast over all peoples,  
the veil that is spread over all nations.*

<sup>8</sup> *He will swallow up death forever;  
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,  
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,  
for the LORD has spoken.*

<sup>9</sup> *It will be said on that day,  
“Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.  
This is the LORD; we have waited for him;  
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”*<sup>10</sup> Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 35:10

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 25:6–9



**Prayer of the Church**  
**Last Sunday of the Church Year**  
**21 November 2021**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. Heavenly Father, send forth Your Son, we pray, to lead home His Bride, the Church, that with all the company of the redeemed we may finally enter His eternal wedding feast. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, our hope is in You. Grant all pastors and servants of Your Church to proclaim that hope in boldness and clarity. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Grant to all Your baptized people diligence to watch for the Savior's appearing, that they may be prepared for that joyous day. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

King of the nations, hear our prayers for those who lead our country and all who serve in our military. Fill them with Your wisdom, and protect them in every danger. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Emily and Pastor Koepp*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Chezlie & Tyler* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, You promise everlasting joy to Your people. Remember all in trying circumstances: the sick, the suffering, the dying, the mourning *especially Your servants Carmen, Marvin, Judy, Zoey, Floyd, David, and all we name in our hearts.* Comfort them with Your divine promises, and grant Your healing peace. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Giver of the feast, You provide a foretaste of the divine wedding banquet at Your Son's table. Grant repentance and faith to all who commune this day, that they may receive His body and blood in a worthy manner and show forth His praise in their lives. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, we here remember the sufferings and death of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation. Praising His victorious resurrection from the dead, we draw strength from His ascension before You, where He ever stands for us as our own High Priest. Gather us together, we pray, from the ends of the earth to celebrate with all the faithful the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. Graciously receive our prayers, deliver and preserve us, for to You alone we give all glory, honor and worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

