

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

The Last Sunday of the Church Year (2021)

Are You Ready for the Heavenly Bridegroom?

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“And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.” (Matthew 25:10, ESV)

Where has the time gone? I asked this question at Matin’s last Wednesday in reference to how quickly 2021 was coming to a close, and I ask it again today as we celebrate the Last Sunday of the Church Year, closing the Church Year and looking forward to the new church year of 2022, which begins with the season of Advent. But today not only reminds us of the closing of a church year it also reminds us that the Lord has promised He will come again in glory, ending all years, both church and temporal. So this begs the question, *Are You Ready for the Heavenly Bridegroom?* Are you ready to meet the Lord, whether on the Last Day of civilization or on your last day as God calls you from this veil of tears? The parable of the Ten Virgins in today’s Gospel Reading gives us clear warning to be ready.

It’s amazing how man can take this parable and find all sorts of allegories for the objects therein, asking questions such as, why virgins, what do their lamps represent, how are we to interpret the oil for their lamps, and so forth. But focusing on these objects often leads one to miss the true meaning of the parable; be ready for the heavenly Bridegroom. Be ready for the Last Day. However, we might remind ourselves, we cannot get ready for the return of the bridegroom, we must be ready.

We know not the day nor the hour of His return. If we did, perhaps we could get ready. Perhaps we could make the proper preparations: accumulate palm branches, make certain our cloaks were cleansed to pave the path for His return, adorn our houses of worship with gold and silver, or try any of the other myriad preparations we might think will prepare ourselves for His return. Yet these temporal preparations would be of little avail, for it is not human preparations which make us ready, but God’s preparation.

The parable of the Ten Virgins is part and portion of our Lord’s sermon preached to His disciples, answering their question: ***“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” (Matthew 24:3 ESV)***. After having answered their question with a series of warnings and explanations, Jesus finally tells them, ***“Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (Matthew 24:36 ESV)***. Therefore, since no one knows the day or the hour of our Lord’s return, we are reminded to always be prepared for His arrival. Until that day there is one thing certain, Satan will challenge us with all manner of troubles and tribulations testing our preparedness. Some will remain steadfast and prepared while others will fall away. Some will hear the Word of God and receive it with joy, but the Word will not take root and when trial and tribulation come their way, they will fall away. Others hear the Word and believe, but the cares of life and the lure of riches will choke off the Word, and they too will fall away. Such as these fail to remain prepared. These are the five virgins whose lamps run out of oil. They were not prepared.

Jesus tells us, *“The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.”* (Matthew 25:1–4, ESV)

The five foolish virgins failed to bring adequate oil. As the Bridegroom was delayed, they slept, and their lamps slowly but surely consumed the oil that was in them. Suddenly, the Bridegroom’s arrival is announced, but due to His late arrival, the lamps of the five foolish virgins were unable to provide light for His arrival, the oil in their lamps being too low to give light. With a frantic plea, they beg those who had brought extra oil to share their oil with them. But there was not enough oil to share therefore, the five foolish virgins had to leave, seeking oil from some other source. While they are gone, the Bridegroom arrives. He invites the five wise virgins into the banquet hall and closes the door, never to be reopened. Now comes the question, how do we apply this parable to ourselves?

The foolish virgins are not prepared because they fail to honor the Bridegroom. Rather than rely on the Word of God, they choose their own word. To be sure, these five foolish virgins are part of the church, part of the group that goes out to meet the Bridegroom, part of those who know of the wedding feast, who want to enter the banquet hall where the feast is to be held. So this parable does not speak of those who have no interest in the wedding feast, or of entering the banquet hall. So, our Lord is not speaking of unbelievers. This reminds us of what the church is. Article VIII of the Augsburg Confession states, *“Although the Christian church, properly speaking, is nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints, yet because in this life many false Christians, hypocrites, and even open sinners remain among the godly.”* (Matt. 23:2).” AC VIII

Entrance into the banquet hall is entrance into heaven. It is the fullness of the eschatological life and salvation. Exclusion from entry is rejection and damnation.

For their failure to adequately prepare, the five foolish virgins are shut out, forever, from the wedding feast. Shut out forever from heaven. Never able to sit at table with Lord and enjoy the great repast of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb in His heavenly home. All for the want of oil. Which then begs the question, “What is the oil?”

The oil is whatever it takes to get you ready for the Lord’s arrival. This is dependent on a believer’s situation and spiritual needs. Thus, oil can be reckoned with repentance, contrition, humility, perseverance, denial of self, a willingness to suffer, and a longing for God’s name to be hallowed. All fruits of a Christian life, fruits which are grown in the house of God where His Word is proclaimed in its truth and purity and the Sacraments are distributed according to His command.

However, rather than focus on the oil let’s look at the purpose of the parable, the parable reveals what the reign of God will be like when it is brought to the world. So, the primary question should be, what is Jesus revealing about *“the reign of heaven or the reign of God, in Christ Jesus?”*

What is the “kingdom of heaven?” What is the “reign or kingdom of heaven or God?” These terms refer specifically to the new work or deeds that God has begun to do in the world through His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. It is God’s royal deeds, His reigning activity in Christ among us. It is the fulfillment of OT prophecy through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Moreover, the parable of the Ten Virgins is the culmination of those deeds with the arrival of His Son on the Last Day.

So this parable asks the question, “What will it be like when God comes to reign in Jesus in all His fullness?” It will be just like Jesus illustrates with this parable. At His arrival some will be prepared, others won’t. Therefore, He exhorts His apostles and us to be prepared, to be ready.

Since we have not yet reached that final hour, that Last Day, when Christ, **“delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.”** (1 Corinthians 15:24–25, ESV) we know that life in a fractured and broken world, is life in a world constantly subjected to the evil plans of Satan.

The world is not our Lord’s rest, nor is it ours, therefore, we wage war, not, **“against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”** (Ephesians 6:12, ESV) Moreover, this war takes its toll and makes it difficult for us to remain prepared. However, preparedness can be maintained by constantly restoring your soul with the oil God has given you, His gift of faith. Through the words of Isaiah, our eyes are opened to God’s holy, compassionate, pastoral love by which He desire to keep us prepared, saying, **“He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.”** (Isaiah 40:11, ESV) This holy, compassionate, and pastoral love of God is revealed to us richly throughout the New Testament in the life, death, and resurrection of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Although our natural condition is one of moral bankruptcy, God’s intervening grace through Christ Jesus rescues us from our pitiful condition. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom, is our sure defense against Satan and the wages of sin, eternal death. As the Last Day approaches, we live each passing day as believers in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, we live under the shadow of the cross, recalling that the most gracious and wonderful rescue of man ever accomplished was accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ as He willingly gave His life as a ransom for ours. Furthermore, to keep us in the faith, our Lord sends the Holy Spirit to sanctify us daily in the faith that we might continue to believe and be prepared for His return on the Last Day.

Therefore, when He does return, we shall not be as the five foolish virgins, but rather we shall be like the five wise ones of whom Jesus says, they **“went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.”** (v. 10)

You can ensure your readiness, your preparedness, your endurance all the way to the end by remaining steadfast in Word and Sacrament ministry. Clinging to God’s Word, being constantly refreshed by the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ. Being held in the loving arms of God through His blessed Means of Grace. Coming to Him in repentance and with a contrite heart confessing your sins and being forgiven through the blessed words of Absolution. Thus, fortified by His Word and Sacraments your lamp will be filled with an inexhaustible supply of oil, and they shall never burn out, you shall always be prepared.

Are You Ready for the Heavenly Bridegroom? You are if you remain in His Word. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.