

"The On-going Feast of the Bridegroom"

Matthew 25:1-13

Nov. 12, 2017

"Then the Kingdom of Heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the Bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise."

O Lord, our Creator, Redeemer and Comforter, as we come together to hear Your Word, we humbly pray that You may open our hearts to the preaching of Your Word, so that we may repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ as our only Savior. Hear us for His sake. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Gospel readings for last three Sundays of the church year all come from the 25 chapter of Matthew. For the next three Sundays, our sermons will be based on these three readings from Matthew 25. Each of these lessons speak to us about what Christians ought to be doing as we wait for our Lord's return.

Today's text shows us that those who have been brought to faith in Christ and remain faithful unto the end of the ages will be invited and escorted into the eternal feast while those who have been negligent of their spiritual condition will be turned away. In the Parable of the Ten Maidens, Jesus proclaimed this truth to His people, for the specific purpose of warning the foolish in the congregation and comforting the wise.

This text concerns itself only with those who call themselves Christians. It has nothing to do with the atheist or the agnostic, and does not have an application to the Mormon or the Jehovah's Witness. It deals with Christians - with the group of people who know Jesus and who fully expect to be with Him in the Heavenly Paradise one day.

In this parable, Jesus introduces a very important truth. All ten maidens have heard of and know the Bridegroom. Every maiden anticipates the arrival of the Bridegroom. Each maiden fully expects to be ushered into the eternal marriage feast. The complete group, each with lamp in hand, went to meet the Bridegroom.

This corresponds to the entire Christian church, including you here at Redeemer. Each of you has heard of the Lord God and has been brought to faith in Christ through the Word of the Gospel. Every one of you anticipates the arrival of Jesus. Each member of this congregation fully expects to be ushered into the eternal marriage feast of the Incarnate Son of God. The complete assembly, each with the promise in hand, steps forward to meet the Royal Redeemer.

But look closer at the ten maidens. Half of them are morons and the other half are thinkers. The foolish virgins have no oil with them. They've got their lamps in hand, but have neglected the oil. Is it any wonder that Jesus used the Greek word for moron? The wise virgins not only have their lamps, but also flasks of the oil needed to keep their lamps bright; the light that enables them to behold the gracious Bridegroom and remain ready.

So, take a closer look at those Christians here at Redeemer Lutheran Church. Some of those Lutherans are morons and the others are thinkers. The foolish members have no oil with them. They've got their membership in hand, but are neglecting the oil. Is it any wonder that Jesus uses the Greek word for moron? The wise followers of Christ not only have the promise in hand, but also faith which hears the absolution, "Beloved, your sins are all forgiven,"; yes, faith which trusts such Word of God in the water and which is strengthened in the Holy Communion of Christ's Body and Blood. These wise ones abide in the the love of the Father of lights Who has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His Beloved Son, in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13-14).

Each of the ten virgins has a lamp. Every member of Redeemer has a soul. The foolish have no oil; the wise have made certain that there is oil for the necessary light. The morons neglect the means by which faith is kept alive while those who think on Jesus make certain that the soul food is with them.

Then the Bridegroom was delayed. Why? The One Who tells the parable does not explicitly tell us here. As the Bridegroom is delayed, time in this world goes on into the night. The Bridegroom could return at any instant, but no one knows when. The five foolish maidens wait with lamps and no oil; the five wise are able to wait, even slumbering, having both lamps and sufficient oil.

So just what is the oil? The oil in the lamp is the on-going feast of the Lord Who provides for His Church as she awaits her Bridegroom's Second Advent. The oil is the means of grace - the Word of forgiveness announced in the absolution and applied to the soul. It's the Baptismal grace that daily rejoices in the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit which He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior that we might be justified by His grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7). The foolish say, "Hey, I was baptized in church." The wise maintain, "Look, I am baptized into Christ's death and resurrection." For the foolish, baptism is something that happened once upon a time. For the wise, baptism is a daily cleansing of sin and renewal in the Holy Spirit.

The oil is the means of grace distributed in the on-going feast of victory from our God Who sustains and nourishes our souls through the Gift of His Body and Blood in the Holy Communion. This is the blessed oil that keeps the lamps burning brightly as the faithful wait for the Advent of the Bridegroom and the commencement of His eternal feast.

The morons in the membership of the congregation think that this Table of the Lord is nice but not necessary, thus cutting themselves off from this on-going feast for two or perhaps even three months. They do not hunger for the Body of Christ and their soul waits for the Lord God Almighty like a moron carrying around an empty lamp and walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Two or three months become the same number of years and extend into two or three decades.

The wise Christians long for the Divine Service on Sundays where the Christ, Himself, serves the oil of gladness in Word and Sacrament. The wise one hungers for the Meal and is thankful that it is served every week. The wise one prepares for the entrance into this sanctuary by recalling that the Old Adam needs to be drowned daily by the Word of Baptism so that, in the Name of the Lord God, in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, he or she may be able to enter the holy place where Christ

announces His forgiveness for all sins of thought, word and deed. Here is the oil of gladness, my friends. Here a Christian may plead, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" and hear the Good News of Christ's atoning Death, His triumphant Resurrection and all that He has done for us and for our salvation. Such a wise Christian returns to his home justified and is able to fall asleep at night knowing that if the Lord returns at midnight, he is ready. Here is the oil of gladness that sustains the soul in a land of darkness and keeps it prepared for the moment of eternity.

And what of those who have lamps without oil? What of those who think that God will open the door to them only because of their Lutheran lineage or their claim of good works or because at least they had the best intentions. The foolishness of these morons is that they still fully expect to enter into Paradise. So, they recline at night with self-deceptive thoughts. They sleep the horrid slumber of those whose lamps are dry and dark; whose souls are dry, shriveled and cracked like a lifeless piece of leather.

Then, when all were sleeping at midnight there was a cry, 'Behold, the Bridegroom! Come out to meet Him.' At the Word of the Bridegroom's impending arrival, all are awakened and all arise. Each one readies her lamp and every wise maiden has the oil needed to trim her lamp. Their souls have been fed, nurtured and sustained with the on-going feast. What a time of great joy and hope and anticipation! What each one had lived for and prepared for is at the Door of eternity. They hear the invitation in the form of proclamation, Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your Master (Matthew 25:23). The wise maidens will be escorted from the on-going Feast of the Church in time to the Eternal Feast of the Bridegroom that lasts forever in Paradise.

At the Word of the Bridegroom's impending advent, all are awakened and all arise. Each one readies her lamp and the foolish maidens discover what they always knew. They have been negligent. Their lamps are not ready and these virgins lack the necessary oil; their souls are empty and they stand at the entrance of eternity without the means of grace.

And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the day of salvation has passed and the time of God's gracious invitation has ended. They tried to get everything in order but in their frantic activity, they discover that they lack the one thing needful. Too late they realize what they lack and they begin begging the wise for their oil.

Neither, on that day, will the wise be able to rescue the lost. It is over and the only thing the wise might say is this: 'Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' And so, the foolish maidens go out to buy oil. It is important to note that Jesus does not mention in this parable that they were actually able to find oil. They went out to look and to buy, but this also is too late. In a frantic dash they come back to the entrance to the wedding hall and discover that while they went to buy, the Bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with Him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut.

These foolish maidens came, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' Will these who have despised preaching and God's Word, and who see no urgent need to partake of the On-going Feast here, suddenly want to be with the victorious, ascended, reigning, majestic Son of God Who has the Eternal Feast? They still think that they do, but it cannot be. If the Ancient of Days opened the Door to Paradise and stood

before them, they would cower and be consumed for they would meet Him, not according to His grace and mercy, but in full view of His perfect wrath and holy righteousness. They will be like the naked who stand exposed before the eyes of the entire world in complete shame, guilt and uncleanness, only they will be standing before God's eyes.

So what will be said by the Lord God Almighty standing on one side of the Door, to those foolish, unprepared individuals on the other side? The Bridegroom replied, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Then, speaking to those who were listening to him, he said: Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

But someone may ask, "The Bridegroom was delayed. Why?" The question really should be asked in a different tense, "The Bridegroom is delayed. Why?" There are at least three reasons:

First, because He desired all people to be saved and is giving His Church time to get the Word of God straight and to get the Word of Life out in order that more people would feast on the On-going Feast in order to enjoy the Eternal Feast.

Second, you may have been foolish and, in His undeserved mercy and grace, the Lord God is delaying the Day of His Second Advent in order for you to receive the gift of repentance and to hear the Word of forgiveness.

And third, so that you may dine in the on-going Feast of His Divine Service here today, so that you may remain ready for your place at the Eternal Feast that the Father has prepared for you by virtue of His Beloved Son's Incarnation by the Holy Spirit, perfect Life, sin-atonement Death, victorious Resurrection and triumphant Ascension. Amen.