

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

People loved by God,

Today's Gospel is one of Jesus' parables | where He uses earthly things (things we can know/understand), to reveal and teach us heavenly truths (things that we do not naturally know/understand).

So when we hear a parable, we are to consider, not just the earthly story part, but especially meditate on what the heavenly truths are that Jesus is teaching us.

As a reminder of the parable, let us listen again to selected verses of the Gospel.

...as follows in Jesus' name:

Jesus said:] "Then 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. ...

"Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ...

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Last week, we heard about Judgment Day, and how on that day, as we confess in the Creeds, the Lord Jesus Christ *will come to judge both the living and the dead.*

No one will escape that day. All will stand before Him to hear their eternal destination declared.

And that CAN sound really scary, especially if you are not certain of what your judgment will be.

But remember what Jesus tells his disciples to do that day, even as the world is crumbling around them,

He says, "**Look up. Lift up your heads for your redemption draws near.**"

In other words, He tells His people to eagerly anticipate that day because they have nothing to fear.

In fact, not only nothing-to-fear, but everything to look forward to,

because they already know what He will say to them, "**Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you...**"

And in this week's Gospel Jesus gives us a picture of what the coming of that Kingdom can be likened to, a wedding feast, with the anticipation and excitement that such a special day brings... and more.

At that time, the venue will be perfect: a true paradise of comfort and joy;

the delicacies will be prepared: the finest and richest cuisine spread before you;

and there, your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be – in His glorious presence.

In Revelation^[5:6], St. John describes Him as **a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain;**

that is, you will get to see the wounds in His hands and feet and side,

the wounds He bore as He paid for each and every sin we have ever committed.

But it will not be a gruesome sight to behold at all.

Those wounds will be the most precious gift that you will ever be able to behold,

because they are the brideprice for your redemption, your eternal salvation.

Those wounds, and the blood He shed for you, are the key to enter the kingdom of heaven.

It will all be ready and prepared, just as Jesus said, "...**I go and prepare a place for you,**

I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also." John 14:2-3

So if your Lord has gone to prepare a place for you, it stands, as you heard in this parable that you should be preparing for His coming also.

In fact, that was the difference between the wise and the foolish virgins/bridesmaids, wasn't it?
The wise prepared provision in case the groom had a long delay, while the foolish merely waited.

So consider these truths from our Lord about the timing of Judgment Day:

As Jesus said at the very end of the parable: **you know neither the day nor the hour.**

In fact, earlier Jesus had even said, **concerning that day and hour no one knows,**

not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son [while He walked the earth], **but the Father only.** Matthew 24:36

So whenever you hear of anyone trying to predict when that day will be, ignore him. = a false prophet.

But we do know THAT the Day is coming... and THAT we want to be prepared for it.

You don't want to miss out on the eternal wedding feast,

because to be shut out of that means an eternity of suffering for the sins the Jesus' already paid for.

...

So what does Jesus teach us to do to prepare? He says, **"Watch,"** that is, be vigilant.

In other words, don't be spiritually lazy or take God's grace for granted.

He is loving and **desires all to be saved**, 1 Timothy 2:4 but that does not mean that He is tolerant.

In love, He has sent His Son into our flesh to bear the punishment for our sin

and to live a perfect life on your behalf... the perfect life that God requires of you.

In love, He has inspired the Holy Scriptures *to be written for our learning, so that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them.* TLH p.14

In love, He sends His Holy Spirit to us today so that you may *take this Word to heart*, ELH p. 86

believe it for your salvation, and live according to it.

On the last day, He will not tolerate those who, yet despised or ignored His Word and didn't prepare.

And don't assume that merely by CALLING yourself a Christian, that He will be satisfied with that.

Those who only SAY they are Christians – even if they live an outwardly moral life –

but do not trust in Christ's life and death for their salvation, are hypocrites before the Lord,
who searches and knows the heart.

They tend to make good neighbors here on earth, but will not be neighbors in heaven.

Our parable today makes this clear.

All 10 virgins or Bridesmaids represent all those who self-identify as Christians.

It doesn't matter what Christian denomination they belong to: Lutheran, Baptist,

Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Orthodox, Presbyterian, Coptic, or what-have-you.

These would be the people who, according to their own profession, would know what Jesus says
and listen to & believe in Him.

But some are wise and some are foolish. Let us consider each.

The foolish ones assume that they will be able to make it until the end, just on what they have already.

They see the wise bring their lamps & extra flasks of oil, but don't think to obtain any extra themselves.

They have the chance to regularly receive and attend to God's Word with fellow Christian,
yet they ignore those chances.

Or they assume that they will be able to use what others have brought,

happy to boast that their family has held membership in a congregation for decades or generations,
or that their congregation faithfully teaches and confesses the true Christian faith,

but their own personal attention to and participation in the Word and Sacrament is negligent.

Or perhaps they assume that they will be able to conjure faith up at the final call:

they have knowledge of Jesus and even trusted in Him at one point, but through spiritual laxity have allowed the **cares and pleasures of this life**^{Luke 8:14} to over take their *fear, love, and trust in God*. On Judgment Day, rather than joy and anticipation, rather than certainty of their destination, having ignored the Lord's Word during their lives, they will be unsure of His Word at the end of life, and so will have fear and anxiety, even as the foolish bridesmaids feverishly went to buy oil.

And realize, the imagery of the oil is important, because it's not something that you can create yourself. It is something that must be obtained from outside of you – thus the foolish had to go to buy more...

That is why many theologians consider this oil to represent true faith in Jesus Christ, because this is something that isn't able to be conjured up by your own thinking or deliberation.

As St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians^[2:8], **"For by grace you have been saved through faith.**

And this [faith] is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." ^{Ephesians}

And where does this faith come from ? – Again, St. Paul writing to the Romans^[10:17],

Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

...

And it is also important to make a distinction between plain knowledge and faith.

Simply knowing that Jesus lived on this earth and was crucified, even crucified for the sins of the world, is not faith.

The chief priests who called for Jesus' death also knew Jesus lived and was crucified, they even believed He rose from the dead, based on the reports of the guards on Easter morning, yet they did not trust that He was their Savior and that His sacrifice was for their salvation.

But faith is a gift freely given by the Holy Spirit through God's Word and through Holy Baptism.

It is not to be mistaken with simple head knowledge, as Jesus says that even infants can have faith; but neither does faith ignore or stop learning God's Word

or assume that life here on earth will be wonderful until the end of the world comes.

In fact, the more faith is informed and enlivened by God's Word,

the more it understands that this world will get even darker still – like midnight – with evil.

And as you see the evil around you growing, you desire all the more to be rid of it – not to join in it; and to live in the light of God's Word, **not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some,**

but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near;^{Hebrews 10:25}

...and the more you desire to hear of Jesus' salvation for you again and again, never tiring of it...

and to be comforted by it as you receive His forgiveness for the sin (the evil) you yourself have done,

and to look with hope to the promise of everlasting life in paradise with your Savior.

This is the wisdom of the wise virgins.

They do not desire the least they can get away with, but desire to bring as much as they can carry; always prepared for however long the Lord might tarry,

not wanting to miss that great and glorious day,

eagerly anticipating the day when our Lord will return in His glory and take them in with Him.

God grant you this wisdom, to grow day by day in grace and Jesus' holiness,

that we might all be gathered with all the saints to the marriage feast of the Lamb,

who was slain for you and for the sins of the world, and yet behold He lives ... and reigns

with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forevermore. Amen.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria