

Matthew 25:1-13 - EHV

At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ When the foolish ones took their lamps, they did not take any oil with them; ⁴ but the wise took oil in their containers with their lamps. ⁵ While the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. ⁶ But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ ⁷ Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, ‘No, there may not be enough for us and for you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ But while they were away buying oil, the bridegroom came. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. ¹¹ Later, the other virgins also came and said, ‘Lord, Lord, let us in.’ ¹² But he answered, ‘Amen I tell you: I do not know you.’ ¹³ Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Dear saints of the true God,

When we used to live out on the East Coast, one of the things that came up every year was the hurricane season. During these late Summer to early Fall months there was always the threat of hurricanes. The people knew this and the weather forecasters made sure that you never forgot. They would begin tracking the storms when they were halfway around the world or least it seemed like it. They gave the coordinates and how fast it was moving and what directional path it was taking. If you didn't know that a hurricane was coming, it was your fault because you were well warned. When the storm got closer to the Coast they would put out specific warnings in the areas where they knew that it was going to hit shore. It was at this time that the people began the ritual of getting their homes and business prepared for the storm. They would buy the big 4'x 8' sheets of plywood and board up any windows or glass. They would tie down their boats that were in the ocean. They would make sure that anything that was loose was tied down or put in a safe place. They bought up all the food and flashlights and batteries that could be found and got ready. If it was going to be a larger hurricane they would actually evacuate entire coastal cities and move the people inland. But there were always those stubborn people who didn't think that it was going to be all that bad, and didn't really prepare themselves. They stayed in their homes and weren't all too worried. The sad part was that it wasn't uncommon to read or hear after the storm hit that many of these people who were unprepared got hurt or even killed because they didn't take the warning seriously.

As we gather today around God's Word, I pray that we take very seriously the warnings that our God has given us about the end of our time on this earth. He has told us he is going to return to judge the living and the dead, and he wants us to be ready and prepared for when this time comes. Today as we look at the parable of the ten virgins, I pray that we take a good hard look at whether we are ready for Christ's return. We will do that under the theme:

THEME: The Bridegroom is Coming

- 1. His Coming is sure**
- 2. Are You Ready?**

1. His Coming is Sure

This parable is based on the Jewish marriage customs of Jesus' time. There was a religious ceremony of betrothal which was much like our engagement but more binding which legally bound the couple together as husband and wife. Weeks or months later the bridegroom went to the house of the bride in order to bring her to his house. The bride's attendants, the virgins, went out to meet the groom and escort him to the bride. They took their lamps to light the way and provide festive lights for the happy banquet that would follow. It is into this context that we want to find some comfort and encouragement as we wait for the day the Lord returns.

The world that we live in is one that hates to wait. We hate to wait at stoplights. We hate to wait in checkout lines. We hate to wait as our computers take time to boot up or download. We hate to wait in drive-through lines and we hate to wait as the car in front of us goes the speed limit when we are in a hurry. We hate to wait until Christmas to open our presents and we hate to wait when our food is too slow in coming at a restaurant. That's because we live in a world of instant everything. We like to see results now. We have instant coffee and instant soup. We have fast food and Internet that claims to work in an instant. We have TV that can instantly tell us what is happening around the world and we have instant updates on all of our stocks and portfolios. You probably are even getting a little antsy as we speak as you sit here right now as you wonder what you need to get done after Church. It is no wonder that we have a little trouble being patient with God's promise that he will return one day to judge.

If only God worked on our time schedule. If only God would speed up his return. If only things would get moving a little quicker. But God's time isn't our time and the thing we want to never forget is that that Jesus will return. In our parable it says, **"While the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'"** In these few words we see that the bridegroom came after a long time. The virgins were made to wait longer than they expected. Some of them were not ready for this long wait. As we go through life I pray that we never forget these promises of God's return, as he writes words that remind us he will return and that he will come in power and might as he judges the living and the dead. His return is a fact that has been promised throughout his Word. Even if it doesn't fit our timetable or our schedule, may we always wait eagerly for this day.

2. Are You Ready?

Every year in the Fall it seems that our children are taught about fire safety. They even come home from school with a bunch of stuff about fire safety. They are visited at school by the local firemen who teach them how to stop, drop and roll. They pass out nice pamphlets on how to check your smoke detectors and make a fire escape plan to make sure that everyone knows how to get out of your house in the chance that there was fire. They tell you to buy the special rope-type ladders if you have a second floor, and the list seems to go on as you prepare you and your family. But let me ask you a question. How much have you done to prepare yourselves and your children for a fire? If you had a fire would everyone know how to get out of the house? Do you know if your smoke detectors are working? Do you have an escape plan? I have to be honest! I've never really given too much thought about my fire escape plan.

But isn't this much the way that we think about our preparations for Jesus' return on Judgment Day.

We have all been informed and given the information about Jesus' return which is clearly found in the Bible. This instruction many times comes from our religious instruction in Sunday School, Lutheran Elementary School, Confirmation Classes or from our parents. We know that Jesus is going to return, but how prepared are we? Have we been keeping watch or have we been napping? In our text we realize that God calls five of the virgins wise and five of them foolish, **“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish ones took their lamps, they did not take any oil with them; but the wise took oil in their containers with their lamps.”** What made five foolish and five wise? The real question is if we are like the five wise virgins or if we would have to say we are like the five foolish ones.

It tells us that five were wise because they had brought enough oil to last until the bridegroom returned, and the other five were foolish because they didn't bring enough for the long wait. What is interesting about this picture is that initially that all looked the same. They all had lamps with oil and they all were waiting for the bridegroom to come. In the same way it is sometimes hard to tell who is ready for Christ's return and who is not. The words of our parable are directed to those who are Christians or at least claim to be Christians. The foolish virgins are those who think that they are ready for Christ's return, but they are not. Their faith in Jesus is not alive. Who might this be?

Some of them might be like those in the parable of the sower and the seed who believed for a while but fell away because of temptations. Perhaps some of them are the "part time" Christians who attend church only when it is convenient or at the special times of Christmas and Easter and are not really in church all the other weeks of the year. They seem near to God, but they are not really near God. It might include those who are not diligent in their use of God's tools for making our faith strong as they neglect Bible reading, as they are neglectful in their attendance at the Lord's Supper or in Worship at Church. In short it might be those whose faith is not being maintained and replenished by the power of God's forgiving and saving Word. On the outside they might look like Christians and they might even belong to a Christian Church or have been Confirmed at a Christian Church, but on the inside there is nothing. Their lamps are empty!

On the other hand, those who are "wise" in God's eyes are those whose faith is strong in the Lord and their faith is evident throughout their life on this earth. The wise are those who are diligent in using the Gifts of God's Word and the Lord's Supper. The wise are those who are eagerly growing in their faith as they wait for the day that the Lord returns. Their lives will show it. Their faith will be alive and active for all to see. It is something that all will be able to notice. It is certainly not their own works and preparations that make them wise, but it is their trusting in Jesus as the only way to heaven that makes them and all people ready. Their lamps are full and they have oil for the long wait until Jesus comes.

I remember playing on the baseball team in college and we were told to meet at the bus at 7:00 am and that the bus would leave at 7:15 sharp. As we all loaded on to the bus, we realized that there were two players missing. No one saw them at breakfast or in the locker room getting their uniforms. I as well as many of the people on the bus had the thought that we should run and get them, but much to our amazement at 7:15 sharp, the coach told the bus driver to leave. They had missed the bus and the game. Sounds harsh, doesn't it?

In much the same way, when Jesus returns there will no second chances. Only on Judgment Day will be truly be able to tell who is ready or who is not ready. Jesus will return to this earth one day. Will we be ready or will we be left behind to eternal destruction.? Listen to the parable, **“But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ Then all those virgins got up and trimmed**

their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, ‘No, there may not be enough for us and for you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ But while they were away buying oil, the bridegroom came. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. Later, the other virgins also came and said, ‘Lord, Lord, let us in.’ But he answered, ‘Amen I tell you: I do not know you.’ Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

When the Lord comes there is no more time to get ready. He will come suddenly and at a time when we least expect it. If we are ready by God’s grace we will be invited into the eternal wedding feast where we will be forever with our Lord and Savior. If we have gone our own way while on this earth and neglected God and his Word, we will miss our Lord’s return and no matter how loud we cry out, the Lord will not let us into heaven. As Christians who are firmly rooted in God’s Word, Judgment Day is the day we are all waiting for. We are prepared, because God has made us prepared, but for those who are wandering through life, thinking this Judgment Day stuff is not really going to happen, it will be day of eternal sorrow and damnation. Praise God as he leads us more and more into his saving Gospel message that we may continue to grow in our grace and knowledge as we keep watch for that final day. Amen.