

Sermon for the 23rd Sunday After Pentecost
Matthew 25:1-13
Have Your Lamps Ready

Grace, peace, and mercy from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

The wedding ceremony is about ready to begin. The candles have been lit on the altar. The groom, and the ushers are in position at the front of the church and anxiously waiting for the bride to appear. The bride's attendants have processed and are also in place. Everyone one is dressed in their gowns, with hair all made up. The grooms party is all dressed up, cleanly shaven, and new hair cuts. Now it is time. The congregation stands and turns to the rear of the church. And then the bride makes her appearance and ready to process to the groom. Beautiful wedding gown. Hair done fitting for the occasion. The finger nail have been manicured perfectly. She is holding the bridal bouquet of flowers in her hand. But there is something strange. In her other hand she holds a dirty, smelly can of oil. Doesn't she look foolish!?

Well, no. According to Jesus' parable we just heard this morning she would be one full of wisdom.

Weddings were different in Jesus' day. In fact it would be the bride who would be the one waiting for the groom to process to meet his bride. After both families had made all the arrangements, and the betrothal time fulfilled (That would be the engagement period which was just as binding as the marriage), the dowry paid, and now it was time for the wedding ceremony and the feasting to begin. The groom and his party would leave his house and process down the street to the bride's home and take her his home to seal the deal and receive the blessing. This would culminate with a week of feasting and celebrating.

But here in Jesus' parable the groom is delayed. Five brides maids are ready with oil to keep their lamps burning, and five have run short of because of the delay. So it will be when Jesus, the Bridegroom comes to claim His Church, the bride of Christ. The groom has been delayed. He has not returned for His second coming. We are like the waiting bride's maids waiting with our lamps, with our dirty, stinking cans of oil.

When the announcement is made, and arch angel sounds the trumpet, it is time for the bride groom to appear. Those who are ready will have the oil ready for their lamps so they can enter into the heavenly wedding banquet. Those who have let their lamps burn out, they will need to scurry at the last minute to get that oil. But as Jesus states, that may be too late. They will end up being the foolish ones because they will be left outside in the darkness, while the feast goes on in the banquet hall.

How foolish do the five wise bridesmaids look, or better yet how foolish do we wise Christians look to the world lugging those dirty oil cans around, especially before a wedding feast. The world would look at us say, "You don't need all that religion. All dressed up. Bringing your little ones to get baptized. What is that little supper of a small piece of bread and sip of wine going to do for you. Look at you who trust in God of above all things. You know if you elect the right political leaders they will bring the garden of right back and everyone will live in peace and harmony and all getting along. So there are more important things you could be doing. You know that time in church is royal waste of time. You are not helping to grow the gross national product. So you will be fine. There is plenty of time to get things right before Jesus returns."

If you fall for that line from Satan, a lamp once full of oil and an oil can also once full will slowing

burn low, run out, and eventually die. Your faith will be cold and dark and empty and when the bridegroom comes, whose the foolish one now?

But it need not be like that. While an unbelieving world and culture thinks we are foolish like Linus waiting for the great pumpkin, that is not what we are about as God's children. We not like people who are standing around and looking to the heavens looking and listening for the absent bridegroom to appear in the clouds. In fact we are waiting for the appearing of the hidden bridegroom who is really present where two or three are gathered in his name. This the same bridegroom who promised us that He is with us to the end of the age. This is the same bridegroom whose love for you is so great the He went to the cross to embrace you by laying His life down for each one by taking on your sins, the foolish ones, and giving us the light of his forgiveness and the light of his very life. He is the one where death could hold Him down. He rose so that we can have the hope eternal life and be joined to Him as the groom is joined the bride.

He has not left us own our to, that is, hopefully to make to the wedding feast through this hostile foolish world we live in. He has given us the oil for our lamps so that we will be ready. He given us faith and the means to keep it alive.

We do not need to wait for his appearing in the clouds, but the manger at Christmas and on the Holy cross. We fix our eyes where he has promises His presence, the gathering of the community of faith. We fix our eyes and ears of His word where His forgiveness is proclaimed. You are forgiven. He died and rose for you so that you can be His very own. What appears hidden is no longer hidden as we see with eyes of faith. Our sins which separate us no longer can no longer separate us from God because of the love of the Jesus our bridegroom had done for us.

So this parable today helps us to keep things in the right focus by focusing on Christ and Him alone in his community, in our baptism, in our communion, in his word, in his forgiveness. All of these help us have our lamps ready for when He comes again. We need these in our faith lives.

Our marriages in this life usually begin with a honeymoon. That last a week or two. Then Life happens. The sin and forgiveness and that struggle continues everyday until death do us part actually comes true. Now imagine a marriage where honeymoon never ends, but last forever. That is way it is with Jesus. Having your lamps ready means waiting and living in Christ. Yes we might struggle and feebly so, with doubt and anxious times. But it will not be always be like that. The Lord will one come as he has promised and to take us to his Heavenly home that he prepared for us. There will be feast of the likes you have never seen before.

So don't let the world's foolishness get your eyes off Christ, instead let the foolishness of Christ Jesus, crucified and risen make you wise. That when He does appear you will be ready and your lamp will be ready and full of oil and light.

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