**Matthew 25:1-13 November 8, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of Matthew the 25th chapter here re-reading these words. “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. Afterward the other virgins came also saying, “Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered, “Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Oh, how we love to laugh, at the foolish ones. Last week I was testing out the projector and DVD player to make sure it would work for our Stewardship Sunday presentation after the service and I had to find a DVD here at the church to make sure everything was working and you could hear it at the end of the sanctuary. And as I was looking around I found the best of Don Knotts from The Andy Griffith show. So, as strange as this may sound, there I was just about a week ago, sitting in the very last pew here in the sanctuary of Trinity Lutheran Church in Onekama, watching Don Knotts playing Sheriff Deputy Barney Fife and he was, as usual, doing some foolish things. We love to laugh at fools. You can think of shows like America’s Funniest Home Videos, or go back even further from television to the Three Stooges and realize that we find it amusing when other people do foolish things.

But the truth is we’ve all done foolish things in our lives. I’m sure you can think of a time when a happy and momentous occasion was ruined by a foolish mistake. Maybe you were invited to a party and as you pull into the driveway you realize that you forgot to bring a gift. We’ve also seen happy days ruined by incompetent people. Oddly enough, these sorts of things usually happen on wedding days. Suddenly foolish thoughts start coming up during the planning of the wedding, like extravagant wishes for the reception. And on this happy day, all it takes is the actions of a few fools to ruin the joy of the occasion. Sadly, foolish actions and foolish arguments can completely ruin times that are supposed to be filled with laughter and merriment.

This parable of Jesus here in Matthew 25 speaks about a magnificent marriage feast that was to be attended by 10 virgins. 5 of them were wise, and 5 of them were foolish. But it’s important to remember that in this parable, just like every other parable that Jesus uses to teach His disciples, and ultimately teach us, He is speaking to fools. We are fools in comparison to Christ’s perfect and omniscient knowledge of all things. We are fools in our attempts to make ourselves perfect when we are clothed in the disgusting stain of sin. And ultimately that nature shows itself in our actions against each other because we do foolish things. We ruin happy moments in our lives and the lives of those around us because we are sinners and sinners sin against each other. We are a perfect example of that because Trinity Lutheran Church in Onekama, is not a theater that shows old Andy Griffith episodes on Sunday morning so that we can laugh at the foolish actions of Don Knotts as Barney Fife. We are an imperfect church. We are a group of sinners, gathering together and receiving the forgiveness of sins. This is not the perfect Church, it isn’t full of perfect people. If we were going to attempt to throw out all of the foolish and hypocritical sinners in this Church we all would be outside those doors, and I would go first. We are fools, we need forgiveness, and ultimately we need Jesus Christ.

I bring this up at the start of our meditation on this wonderful parable because, as we’ve talked about in the past, sometimes it’s easy to read a parable like this and give it a very simple explanation. “This one’s easy Pastor, 5 virgins were wise (that’s me) 5 virgins were foolish (that’s them) and we should be like the wise and not like the foolish. The end” But like any part of Scripture there’s more to it than that. This is not a morality lesson. And truthfully, this parable isn’t about us, or anything that we do. It’s about what was given to us, and how we should regard the coming of Jesus Christ.

Because, when we really dive into this parable, we see that the 5 “good” virgins aren’t perfect at all. They are still the ones who fall asleep while waiting for the groom to come. They also are the ones who mistakenly give the foolish virgins terrible advice on how to be ushered into the marriage feast. They are not worthy on their own merits, they simply have enough oil.

But they are chosen. All of the virgins are. It was the custom for marriage at the time that Jesus was writing that the bride and her friends or bridesmaids as we see illustrated here as the virgins would wait until the groom came to meet them. And when He did, he would usher them into the marriage feast. The marriage feast is similar to a wedding reception that we have today except that it lasted longer, but it was a happy and glorious celebration of the union of husband and wife for the families and all those that they had invited. The virgins are waiting with oil in their lamps so that they are seen by the groom when He comes and so they are let into this glorious feast of happiness. The groom is Jesus Christ, the one who will come back as He promised to take us to be with Himself for all eternity. And we are the virgins, waiting patiently for His return and staying vigilant to hear the call that He is coming. We too are chosen. We are called as sons and daughters of God, just as these virgins were to be in this place of significance.

But we, as God’s elect, are like these virgins. We grow tired of waiting. We fall asleep in the faith. And it’s a subtle slipping away to sleep from our faith. The devil is crafty, and knows that one temptation leads to another. He knows that we need to be in God’s House hearing his Word, and so when we do go to Church and receive God’s gifts he then plants the same seed that he planted with Eve in the Garden of Eden. Did God really say that I had to go to Church every week? And so it starts with just taking a few weeks off of Church to do more important things. Things that come up that are really important and can’t wait. Which leads to anything being more important than receiving the gifts that God freely gives here in His Divine Service. And before we know it, it’s been weeks since we’ve been to Church. And then months. And then finally, we are asleep in our faith for good. This is also a temptation when it comes to the contemporary way that we can experience God and His Word. Perhaps you’re watching this service from the comfort of your own home. That’s all fine and well for concerns over your own health and safety in the midst of a pandemic. But when does it become a crutch? Church being simply a convenient easy to digest few minutes of your day from the comfort of your home? And your faith being lulled and dulled into sleep. Church isn’t a place you go, it isn’t a place you support, it’s just a show you watch. And when that show gets boring, you watch a different one. Here we can see that the more things change, the more the devil remains vigilant and uses the same temptations to lure us away from God and His love.

Don’t be confused. All of these virgins were foolish. Don’t be puffed up with pride. We are foolish too. Don’t be mistaken, and heed my words today. Christ will come at a time we least expect him. Scripture speaks of Jesus returning “like a thief in the night”. Here we see that the groom arrives at midnight! At midnight the call goes out that the groom is coming and all should be prepared. Midnight, a terribly inconvenient time for all involved. A time when all the virgins had to scramble to trim their lamps and be seen when he came.

Christ will come, in a moment that none of us expect, to take us to be with Him for all eternity. And in that moment, the fools will be unprepared. The fools of this world won’t have the oil of sustaining faith in Jesus Christ and will instead turn and beg anyone around them. They will panic, and they will listen to any advice, even the wrong advice, to save themselves. The foolish virgins show their madness in they go out, at midnight, to buy oil for their lamps. Now at the time of Jesus there wasn’t a 24 hour superstore just down the block where there would be 3 aisles of oil available. At that time of night there was nowhere to purchase oil. There was simply darkness. And when they return they remain in darkness. For the groom had come and ushered in those who remained and waited for Him. The door was closed. There was no second chance.

The foolish virgins may blame the groom for not giving them a second chance and for arriving so late, but the truth is, the groom shows His love in many ways. The groom shows his love in his arrival late, because it allows for more to be invited to this glorious feast. His love is shown in his patience, for anyone who has been married knows, on the day of your wedding you are constantly pulled in many directions, and it is out of love and respect to your loved ones that you take the time to speak to them. So it is with Christ, He waits out of love for those who have not yet been invited to the glorious feast.

. The virgins oil kept the flame bright so that they were seen by the groom when he arrived. And that oil is our faith. Our faith that remains in spite of our lazy attitude toward worship and God’s Word. The faith that receives the invitation and that ushers us into the glorious feast of heaven eternally. Our place in the bridal party, is a gift. For we have done nothing to earn our identity as sons and daughters of God. Our invitation and what is used in order for us to be seen and saved is a gift. The oil is our faith, faith given in the waters of Holy Baptism. Faith that is doubled, tripled, and continually filled and strengthened by Jesus Christ who speaks to us through His Word, guide us through His promises, and provides for us in His Sacraments.

The fools ruin these gifts by taking advantage of the love and charity of the groom. Their oil is so little that there isn’t enough for them to be saved. So it is with a lazy faith that is not strengthened by God and His Word but instead is like a flame that has slowly flickered and finally gone out. And then, in their panic, they do not stay at the place of salvation, waiting for the groom in spite of the darkness of sin, they instead run out in a panic to find salvation somewhere else. That is the evidence of their foolishness. For salvation is found in no one else but Jesus Christ. Just as the idea that going out to buy oil at midnight would be a laughable mistake at the time of Jesus, so it is a monumentally foolish mistake to seek salvation in anyone else, but Jesus Christ our Lord.

So don’t be fooled. Jesus himself said that He will come again to take us to be with Him for all eternity. And that’s why we stay vigilant and ready. We stay rooted in the place where we still today find Him, and that’s His Word. Because in that Word He keeps our lamps burning with the oil of a strong faith that He himself provides. May God be with you as you wait for His return in the love of Jesus Christ who saves us from the darkness of sin.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.