

Dear friends in Christ,

As the church year draws to a close, the themes of our texts center on the sudden end of history when Jesus comes without notice. 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 in the Church.

The words of Jesus in Matthew 25:1-13 are sobering and ought to cause each of us to relect. His Words are, first of all frightening and secondly quite comforting. The theme is: *"The On-Going and the Eternal Feast of the Bridegroom."*

*"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. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the Bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Behold, the Bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' And 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. Afterward the other maidens came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' But He replied, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."*

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

This portion of the Holy Writ 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.

Jesus uses the form of a parable to teach His church, which is described as ten maidens, 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 complete congregation here at Faith Lutheran, Abilene. 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 at Faith 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, thy 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 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 Faith Lutheran 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 whereby 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 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 - the Baptismal grace that daily rejoices in *the washing of rengeration 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."

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 weeks. 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 weeks 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 Divine 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, dear people. Here a Christian may plead, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" and hear the Good News of Christ's sin-atonement Death, triumphant Resurrection and all that He has done it for us and for our salvation. Such a wise man 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 their legalistic foundation or their best of intentions of their stone cold hearts. The foolishness of these morons is that they still fully expect to enter into Paradise. So with a devilishly placed veil over their eyes, they recline at night with self-deceptive thoughts. They sleep the horrid slumber of those whose lamps are dry and dark; whose souls are dun, 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 advent, all are awakened and all arise. Each one readies her lamp and every wise maiden has the oil needed to trim her lamp. They have souls 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. But the foolish may not have the Gospel promise that has been applied to the faithful heart of the wise. Neither, on that day, will the wise be able to evangelize 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.'* Thus did 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, as well as seeing no 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. The hymn stanza that we will sing later declares the truth:

"But sinners, filled with guilty fears, Behold His wrath prevailing, For they shall rise and find their tears, And sighs are unavailing; The day of grace is past and gone; They trembling stand before His throne, All unprepared to meet Him" (TLH 604, st. 3)"



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.'* Thus did Jesus end this parable concerning the Kingdom of Heaven and this did He then speak to those standing before Him, *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-atoning Death, victorious Resurrection and triumphant Ascension. Amen.