

## Last Sunday in the Church Year, A<sup>x</sup>D 2010

### Matthew 25:1-13

*In the name of the Father and of the <sup>x</sup> Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

1 Ten virgins: half wise, half foolish. What's the difference between the wise virgins and the foolish virgins? They're all waiting for the Bridegroom. They all come dressed in their finest, beautifully appareled and gorgeously jeweled. They all brought lamps. They all fell asleep while waiting. But when the Bridegroom comes, only the wise are welcomed into the wedding feast. To the foolish ones, He says, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you." The only difference between the wise virgins and the foolish ones, the only difference between getting into the feast and being excluded, is the oil.

2 Does this scare you? All ten seemed to be waiting for the Bridegroom. Not all church members will be saved. Not all virgins were wise. Not all had enough oil. Yikes! How can you be sure? Is there any certainty before the Bridegroom comes? If you just look at the virgins, if you just look at the exterior of a person, you cannot know. In fact, if you had looked at the virgins before the Bridegroom arrived, while they were still preparing for the waiting, you might have guessed that the outcome would have been the opposite. Five virgins had carefully calculated how much oil they would need until the arrival of the Groom. Five were less precise with their calculations, sloppier in their preparation, less tidy in their packing. Carrying these big five-gallon buckets of oil, they don't look wise or well-prepared. They look over-packed, foolishly neglecting to determine the correct amount of oil. The virgins who looked wise before the coming of the Groom were those who figured out how much oil they would need, not these five girls lugging their silly buckets of oil around, dripping some here and there, stumbling and tripping under the weight. That's foolish. They should have planned better. Or so it seemed. But then the seemingly foolish virgins with an abundance of oil are declared wise, possessing enough oil, and the carefully calculating virgins are declared foolish, failing to see that they could never calculate the amount required.

3 So what is the oil, and how can you have enough? The required oil is the Holy Spirit. He ignites the flame of faith and keeps it burning until the Day of Christ the Bridegroom's return. Oil is not something you give to yourself. Faith is not something you can enkindle apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. So you confess, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the one true faith."

4 Being wise is not a matter of having more wisdom or more knowledge; it's a matter of having enough oil. Can you ever have confidence that you have enough oil? Yes, absolutely. What God gives is always enough. Your confidence is in His calculations, not your own. What you can calculate is never enough. Calculating will leave you short. Go to the merchants while there is still time. No more calculating, no more asking "how much is enough." Faith says yes, receives what God gives. No more putting off going to the merchants, the ministers of Word and Sacraments, for oil. No more excuses about busyness or waiting for a better oil merchant. No more contempt for the oil of the Holy Spirit by driving Him away, no more intentional sin, no more willful breaches of conscience, which drive away the Holy Spirit, which fight against faith. No more counting yourself among the wise merely because you once had faith. Faith is sustained the way it was delivered: by the Holy Spirit.

5 The warning against being found foolish, without the Holy Spirit and without faith, is stern, but the welcome for the wise, those who received and retained faith from the Holy Spirit, is warm. The Bridegroom will return, to be sure. And when He does, nothing will make Him happier than to gather the bridesmaids to be with His beloved Bride. He desires that all be in the wedding banquet. The banquet has been paid in full. The Bridegroom paid for it with His life. No expense was spared;

everyone included in the invitation. Not with gold or silver but with His holy precious blood, the Bridegroom paid in full. Before He came to collect the bridesmaids on His way to greet His bride at the wedding and banquet, He came to pay for their entry. Jesus who will return came once. He came for both wise and foolish, to pay for their sins, to bear their foolishness, to deliver the wisdom of faith.

6 The Groom is coming. The waiting will soon be over. Continue to prepare for His coming by receiving Him at His Supper. The Lord's Supper is not an it; it is Him: Jesus, given to you by the Holy Spirit to prepare you for Day when He comes visibly to gather all those who belong to Him, who retain His gift of faith until that Day or until the day of death. The Holy Spirit is here abundantly for you. The gifts of God are not a burden. Having enough oil is not drudgery. It is comforting and pleasant to receive the Holy Spirit, to be a hearer of the Word of God, to have sins washed away in Holy Baptism, having sins removed with a word in Holy Absolution, eating the Body and drinking the Blood of Jesus for forgiveness: these things are not burdensome. They are the free gifts of God, the means the Holy Spirit uses to fill your lamp with oil, to keep the flame of faith flickering brightly. You can have perfect, certain confidence: the Holy Spirit God gives in His Word and Sacraments is enough. Being where God pours out His Spirit is the guarantee that you will never run out of the oil of the Spirit, that the flame of faith will never flicker and fade. Take heart; the Day is soon. Take heart; the Groom is coming. The banquet is soon.

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*

Pastor Jeff Hemmer