

## The Last Sunday in the Church Year, A ✕ D 2008

**Matthew 25:1-13** "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, <sup>4</sup> but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. <sup>6</sup> But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' <sup>7</sup> Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' <sup>9</sup> But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' <sup>12</sup> But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' <sup>13</sup> Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

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

1        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. And they all grew drowsy and 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        Many seem to be waiting for the coming of the Groom. Even though congregations everywhere bemoan the fact that there are not more people in attendance on Sunday morning, there are people in pews in every church having Sunday morning services. People are hearing God's word. They have their names on the membership roles of the congregations. To all on the outside, they look very much like Christians. But, then, there seemed to be no difference between the wise and foolish virgins until the foolish virgins realized they had no oil. When the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, returns, it will be insufficient merely to look like other Christians. You must have the oil of faith. Your lamp is otherwise worthless. The coming Lord won't look at your membership in any congregation. He won't look at whether you call yourself a Christian or whether others call you a Christian. If you are without the oil of faith, His word to you will be "Truly I say to you, I do not know you."

3        All the waiting virgins brought lamps. But lamps without oil cannot produce light. That's what the oil is for, after all, burning to create light. It's what oil does. Likewise, faith naturally creates good works. The foolish virgins could not see the coming of the Groom because they had no light. They had no light because they had no oil. Don't foolishly suppose you can have faith that doesn't produce good works. And yet your works aren't what gain the attention of the Bridegroom. He doesn't come looking for lights; He comes looking

for the bridesmaids. But if you have oil, you'll have light. If you have faith, you'll do good works. Otherwise, you'll hear, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you."

4 The virgins were wise because they had been to see the merchants to obtain oil. But they knew that they could not give their oil to the foolish women. They would have to get their own oil. Neither can faith be given. You either receive it where the Lord has promised to deliver it, or you will not have it. Your husband who tells you he believes in God but refuses to come with you to church will not be saved by proximity to your faith. Faith is not contagious. Your children who insist that it must be okay with God if everyone is doing it have not inherited faith from you. Faith is not genetic. Your coworkers who make no profession of faith but who seem to be good enough people will not be saved. Your friends who go to church out of habit or from a feeling of obligation but who have no faith will not be spared because of your faith.

5 Now is the time for acquiring faith. Go to the dealers now that you may obtain oil. If you wait like the foolish virgins, you may be too late. Where are the dealers who have this faith? Where may you obtain faith? Here. So that you might have the faith required of you, the Lord established the Office of the Ministry. So that you might have this faith, which comes by hearing, God ensures that His word is preached. So that you might have this faith, the Lord Jesus called his apostles to make disciples by baptizing and catechizing. So that you might have this faith, Jesus sent ministers to forgive sins. So that you might have this faith, the Savior sent pastors to speak His Words of Institution and distribute His Body and Blood. Go now to the dealers, to pastors; go now to the marketplace of faith, to the congregations where the Word is rightly preached and the Sacraments rightly administered.

6 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. The Bridegroom is coming. Indeed, He himself says, "I am coming quickly." Repent of your false hopes. Repent of imagining that simply looking like a Christian will save you. Repent of the foolish belief that you may have faith without works. Repent of despising the Lord's gift of faith which He freely gives through His Word: preached and delivered through sermons and Sacraments.

7 The story only ends badly for the foolish virgins, and only because of their own foolishness. But the other virgins are welcomed warmly to the eternal wedding banquet. They are the delight of the Groom. They're waiting because the Groom has already visited them once. He already came to prepare for the banquet. Everything is prepared and paid in full because the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom for

whom we wait, paid for it with His life. Why wait? Why have faith? Why imagine that things will be better when the Bridegroom returns? Look what He has already done. He died on the cross to join His Bride, the Church, to Himself eternally. He spared no expense, poured out His entire life, so that She might be His. No wonder the wise virgins are watching and hoping for His return. If your Lord was willing to die on the cross, to give Himself completely as payment for your sin, will He not continue to give Himself completely to you when He returns?

8 On the other side of the door is the endless banquet. The Groom longs to welcome you to the feast. And all He requires is that you be found with faith in Him. What's more, He gives the faith He requires. He desires to welcome you so much that He provides ongoing opportunities to receive His gift of faith and have that faith strengthened and sustained. He delivered faith to you through the waters of Holy Baptism and through the preaching of His Word. He sustains that faith through Holy Absolution and His Supper. The Lord provides everything you need to be found ready. He delivers faith, and He guards faith. He has given you the oil of faith, and He guarantees that as long as you allow His Holy Spirit to continue to work, this oil will not run out.

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

*Soli Deo Gloria*  
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