

## **Matthew 25:1-13** - “Being Ready”

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Since we have reached the last three Sunday’s of the Church Year, our readings will be focusing on the Last Day—our last day in this world or the Last Day of this world (which ever comes first). Our reading’s today describe some who were ready for the Last Day, and some who were not.

One of the striking things about our OT and Gospel readings is that some of those who were not ready appeared to be members of the church. In the OT reading Amos said, “*Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD*” (Judgment Day). Then he goes on to say that the LORD despised their “offerings,” and the “noise of [their] songs”—their worship, because it was evidently not coming from a heart of faith. Therefore, they were not ready for the Last Day. Unless they repent, that last day would be a day of disaster.

The same lack of faith in the heart existed in half of the virgins in Jesus’ parable. While all ten virgins appeared to be children of God, waiting for the Bridegroom (Jesus Christ), half of them were only going through the motions of being God’s people.

While these foolish virgins may have at one time had hearts of faith, evidently they had no faith when they went to sleep. In our Epistle reading for today, sleep is compared to our physical death. Most of us would like to die peacefully in our sleep and wake up in heaven with the Lord. But if you die in your sleep without faith in Jesus Christ, you will not wake up in heaven but in hell (which is not a place of peace).

Perhaps that’s why, when the Bridegroom in Jesus’ parable arrives, the wise virgins were unable to share their oil with the foolish virgins (and were not told that the foolish virgins were able to find any oil elsewhere). On the day the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, arrives/returns (as on the day of our death), it will be too late to receive the gifts of God. “*Now is the day of salvation*” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

The foolish virgins, before they fell asleep, can be compared to those in the church who for some reason think they can keep their faith alive apart from God’s Word and the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. What causes them to think that way? The same sinful nature in all of us that works to prevent us from daily devotions—from taking time out of what we’re doing to try to sustain our lives in this world and coming to the only giver and sustainer of true and eternal life, the Word of God—Jesus Christ.

We need to be careful here when thinking about our lives as God’s people who struggle between the wise and foolish things we do every day. Just because we do foolish things doesn’t necessarily make us complete fools (like the foolish virgins in our text). Hopefully the wisdom in our lives, our God given faith in His Word, is strong enough to break us free from our foolish sins by repenting of our sins and seeking the Lord’s sure forgiveness.

But what happens when our faith or the faith of another Christian’s is so weak that it doesn’t turn us around through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ? Where do we or they stand before God? We can’t say for sure because we can’t see into our hearts like God can. But if we’re not repenting of our sins, we’re on shaky ground. If there is a smoldering wick of faith in

us, God promises not to put it out (Matthew 12:20). But such smoldering wicks are certainly in danger of going out.

That's why God seeks to strengthen our weak faith through His Word and Sacraments. The works and gifts of God can be compared to the oil which the wise virgins had with them. The oil may represent all that God does to make us ready for the time when He will either call us to our eternal home with Him through death, or when He will return on the Last Day, both of which could come at any time.

Apart from God, we are like this piece of string, and our sins and the troubles of life in this world are like this fire. They will burn us up. But when we are covered with the oil of God's love and work of salvation in Jesus Christ, God makes us like the string or wick in this candle. Instead of the fire burning us up and out, God turns our sins and troubles into opportunities to share the light of our faith in Jesus Christ with others.

For we, by the grace of God, believe that God makes and keeps us ready for our death and/or the end of this world through His Son, who became a man in Jesus Christ so that He could pay for our sins. Through Jesus' damning death on a cross in payment for our sins, He shows us clearly what our sinful thoughts, words and deeds want to ultimately do to us—to destroy us. And through Jesus' resurrection from the dead in a glorious body, free from sin, death and everlasting darkness, our Lord shows us clearly His power to do the same for us—to deliver us from our sins and death.

There is no better protection against the forces of evil at work in us and in our world today than the message of the cross—the Good News that Jesus has taken away our sins through His death, and risen from the dead to give us His eternal life. So the Lord continues to drench us in the oil of His death and resurrection through His Word and Sacraments to deliver us from the fires of hell and make us lights of His salvation for others.

All glory be to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[Children's Sermon] This morning I brought with me a little electric candle-looking light. But this little light can't shine by itself. It needs to be connected to a battery in order to shine.

The same is true with you and me. When God the Father created us we were meant to shine as His children. But we can't shine as God's children until we are connected to the Light of the world, Jesus Christ.

Do you know what was disconnecting or cutting us off from Jesus? Our sins, all the bad things we do. So what did Jesus do to get rid of our sins. He died on a cross, and then rose from the dead to give us faith in Jesus as our Savior. God gives us faith in Jesus through Baptism and through His Word in the Bible (where God tells us about Jesus). We shine now because God gave us faith that Jesus got rid of our sins (like me getting rid of this little plastic strip in this candle-light) so that we can shine as God's children now and forever!

Will shining our light/telling others about Jesus wear us out? Yes, but we can always come back to God and His Word, where He energizes us to keep us shining.