

“The Wise and the Foolish”
Based on Mt. 25:1-13
Preached on Nov. 8, 2020

“Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Fellow baptized saints and bride of Christ, we are in the final Sundays of the church year. Today is the third-last, so what do you think our focus would be at a time like this? That’s right. The end. The Last Day. The Day of the Lord. Just as there was a beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, there is also an end of this creation and the rising up of a new creation out of the death of the old. Just as there is a death, so there is an end to this dying creation.

Talk of the end tends to make people a bit nervous. Edgy. Weird even. It is, and should be, a frightful thing to say, “He will come again to judge both the living and the dead,” yet we seem to rattle it off so easily. Certainly, it is because our faith tells us we will be saved, judged innocent by the forensic verdict pronounced over us in our Baptism into Jesus’ death. More than simply being “not guilty” – we are declared innocent, a verdict never heard in an earthly courtroom. Earthly courts pronounce you “not guilty,” but at God’s bar of justice you are declared innocent in the righteousness of Jesus.

But just because we are and will be declared innocent by God’s grace through faith in Christ, nonetheless that Day of the Lord will be a day of wrath and mercy. Of wrath against sin and unbelief and all the ways we have of getting in the way of God’s good and gracious will to save, and of mercy, undeserved kindness toward the sinner all for the sake of Christ.

But how will it happen? And when? There was some confusion over the timing of that Day among the early believers. They had heard Jesus say, “Behold, I come quickly,” and some heard it as “I am coming soon.” Soon and quickly are the same word in Greek (*taxu*). The problem is “soon” tells you when; “quickly” tells you how. And our old Adam, the old sinful self, is far more interested in the when. He really couldn’t care less about the how. He just wants to know how much time he has left – how much longer he can play fast and loose with God – how much longer he has before things get serious. That’s what so interesting about that Greek word *taxu*. Time’s up, Jesus says. I won’t tell you when, just that it will be quickly, so you have to take it seriously now. No more letting the old Adam run loose in your life. Now is the time for faith. Think of the descriptions.

Jesus appears suddenly and without warning, like lightning, like a thief in the night, like a groom kicking off the wedding party at the ridiculous hour of midnight. Wait, what? The groom starts the wedding? Yes, remember - it's the year 30 A.D. and we are in Ancient Israel. You need to throw out everything you know about weddings today, because in Jesus' day things were completely different. The groom didn't stand awkwardly at the altar waiting for his bride. He had a completely different duty. And the bride didn't venture out with her entourage in hopes of finding the groom at the altar. In fact, things were the complete opposite.

On the wedding day, the groom would dress in wedding garments, and his friends would escort him to the house of the bride. The bride would come out to meet them with her friends. Then, the whole group would joyously parade to the home the groom had prepared for the feast, which you could guarantee was going to last an entire week, at which the most elaborate meals that the groom's family could afford would be served one after another after another. And in order to seal the marriage covenant, the bride and groom would drink wine from a common cup to signify the joy of their new life together.

And here's our in. Here's our way to answer that question – what is our perspective today, living here in the end times, nearly 2000 years since Jesus said, “I come quickly”? How do we live as end-times people? The parable of the wedding shows us. “The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.” OK, yes, it's true, you're going to have to identify with bridesmaids here, but just bear with it. Don't think about frilly dresses and uncomfortable shoes. Just focus on oil lamps. Little clay pots with a wick and a few ounces of oil that you carried like a candle. That was their job. To show up at the wedding with oil lamps. Five brought extra oil; five didn't. Five would not let anything get in the way of their being in the wedding; the other five, well quite honestly, they had better things to do. And who wants to look so silly carrying around some clunky bottle of oil anyway?

The foolish figured they knew the time. They figured a few ounces was enough. They figured they knew the groom and his ways. But they figured wrong, and so they missed the party. The wise, on the other hand, were over-prepared, like a bunch of girl guides. Their whole focus, the center of their lives, were those oil lamps and having enough oil to be ready at any moment, any time.

What no one figured was that the groom would be late. What no one figured was that everyone would fall asleep. What no one figured was the groom was a little on the crazy side and decided to start his wedding at midnight.

It isn't until the end that the folly of the foolish is revealed for what it is. Not a day sooner. Until then, the foolish appear wise, cool, stylish. They appear so in control, so reasonable, so rational. Until the noise begins at midnight, until they wake up in the

darkness and realize they have no oil, and there are no merchants, and there is no sharing, and the door is slammed and locked, and no amount of pounding and pleading is going to open it. They had a place at the wedding party. Christ died for all without exception. They had a seat at the table with their name on it. And in their foolish figuring, they lost out, they are unrecognized. They hear through an eternally shut door, "I don't know you." He invited them, but now He does not know them.

Only at the end, on that Day that ends all days, will the wisdom of your faith be vindicated, and the foolishness of unbelief be revealed.

So hear Him again. Jesus wants you at the feast, and He comes to seal the marriage covenant with you now. To give you the joy of your new life with Him. Drink of it all of you, this cup is the new covenant in My blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. How do you remember your Lord? In His feast. How does your Lord remember you? In His feast. This is REAL. Jesus gives you a foretaste of the feast to come so that you do not lose hope. So that you take your faith seriously. So that you study His Word and grow in grace, plenty of extra oil. So that He Himself can keep you close to Him as He is delayed.

Alleluia. Thanks be to God. But there is one last question, isn't there? What is taking Him so long? What is the bridegroom doing that keeps Him from His bride? Jesus says, "In my Father's house are many rooms and I go to prepare a place for you. I am coming. And I will take you to myself, that where I am you will be also." Jesus is doing what the bridegroom does – He is preparing a place and a feast for His bride. As the Scriptures say, no eye has seen. No ear has heard. No heart has imagined the glory of what He is preparing. So do not let your lamps grow dim. Be watchful, be sober, be ready. Because you do not want to miss this party, and the bridegroom is coming. In Jesus' Name, Amen.