



Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon for the Third Last Sunday 2017

*The Word of God prepares us for our
Bridegroom's Final Coming!*



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 25, 1-13:

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

• **Let us pray:** *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, enlighten our minds and bless our hearts with Your holy Word. Prepare us for the Last Day. Make us wise so that we will be ready when You come. Amen.*

• **Dear Congregation in Christ!**

- The last three Sundays of the Church Year focus on the End-times. The Word of Christ for today is the parable about the ten virgins.
- A most disturbing parable on the one hand. Half of the virgins went in with Jesus to the marriage feast. That is good news. But the other half of the virgins were left outside! That is terrible! Jesus said to them, "*I don't know you*". Right in the beginning we have to see that we are dealing with a very serious issue here. Something which so many people try to interpret away.
- People will be separated in the end. There is a final judgement coming up at the end of this world. This is not a hoax or religious brainwashing. This is also not a trick to

frighten people into submission. This is true, because God says so over and over. On that day nobody will be able to say to Jesus, sorry Jesus, I was stuck in post-modernism which teaches that all will be saved, somehow. Its not going to happen.

• Jesus comes with God's authority today, into our midst, to disperse all these doubts and spirits of uncertainty from us. There will be a final judgement. With this parable Jesus compares what it will be like on that final day of this earth with five virgins who will enter with Jesus and five others who will stay outside. Each of the five represent a group of people. That is how it is going to be. The five outside will call Jesus saying, [11] "*Lord, Lord, open to us!*" They will see themselves as Christians!! They will expect Jesus to open to them. But the Lord Jesus will answer that He does not know them.

• So we see, that the five virgins in this parable, who will in the end stay outside, are not the atheists and all those who reject Christ in any case. Rather, these five foolish virgins represent those people who refer to themselves as Christians, but something vital is missing. Just like the five wise ones, these foolish ones also wait for Christ's second coming! The difference does not lie between those waiting for Christ and those not waiting for Him. All ten went and took their lamps to meet the Bridegroom. Still, only the five wise ones were entering with Jesus.

• Therefore it is crucial to know the difference between the wise and the foolish, not to judge others, but because it is important for ourselves. We need to pay close attention to the parable Jesus tells us.

• The difficulty of a parable lies therein to determine what is meant by the terms. What does the lamps stand for? What does foolish and wise stand for? What is the oil etc. We are in a good position to understand what Jesus was saying, because His Words are part of a Gospel writing, the Gospel written by Matthew, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

• Now in the sermon of the mount, which Matthew recorded in Mt 5-7, Jesus referred to the man building his house on sand as being foolish and the man building his house on the rock as being wise. The *foundation* on which you build your house is vital. If your foundation is perishable your confession with your mouth and deeds of mercy, the fruit Jesus wants, will not count in the end. If however your foundation is the rock Jesus Christ, if you listen to Him and do what He says then your confession of faith and your deeds of mercy are build on an eternal foundation. Heaven and earth will pass away, but the words of Jesus will not pass away (Mt 24,35).

• All ten of the virgins took their lamps, but the five foolish ones, Jesus explicitly tells us, didn't take *oil* with themselves. That is different to the wise, who received oil in their

vessels with their lamps. So the oil in the vessels mark the difference between the wise and the foolish. Not the lamps itself, *the oil in the vessels* mark the difference. We will see just now what is meant by the oil.

• Then we are told that the bridegroom was delayed. (*It was custom for the bridegroom to dress in his garments and his friends would escort him to the house of the bride. The bride would come out to meet them with her friends. The whole group would then joyously parade to the home that the groom had prepared.*) The bridegroom was delayed and all ten virgins became drowsy and slept. The Greek word for “sleep” is the same word Jesus used when He said that the little girl who died was only “sleeping”, which He then called back to life.

• This means that both the wise and the foolish Christians, waiting for their Lord, eventually died. So the difference between them is not apparent as long as they are waiting! The difference between them only sticks its head out on the Day when their Lord does in fact come. Lets see what happens then: At midnight there was a cry: **“Behold the bridegroom! Come out to meet Him.”** Then all the virgins were woken up (*its a passive verb*) and trimmed their lamps. It is only then that the foolish discover that they miss something vital: oil. They didn’t bring extra oil with. *Then* they asked the wise to give them something of their oil, because their lamps were going out.

• They didn’t listen to the Words of the Lord. They never realised what was most important to keep their lamps burning: oil. And then, when it was too late, they asked oil from the wise, but the wise couldn’t give them else they wouldn’t have enough for themselves. So they ran off to buy a ransom. The end result: They were not prepared when the bridegroom came. The door to the marriage feast was already locked and they had to stay outside. They still called: **“Lord, Lord, open to us.”** But the bridegroom said to them: **“Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.”** They were too late. There is a too late. They thought they knew the Lord, but they didn’t. The Lord didn’t know them!

• So what are the lamps? The lamps are the good works of the Christians. In the sermon of the mount Jesus said [5,16]: **“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”** The good works Jesus speaks of here are the exercise of confession of faith and being merciful. These works shine when we do these with faith. But when people do good works without relying on the righteousness of Christ, without drawing on His forgiveness, their lamps will not shine before God. Their works will not cause others to

glorify God, but their works will draw attention to themselves.

- The foolish ones neglect to prepare properly. They didn't take extra oil!
- Now, think for a moment, this is absurd behaviour by the foolish virgins. How can anyone take a lamp but not take oil with? That which is absurd for everyday life will actually happen with many people on the Last Day, because they will take their good works to meet Christ at His second coming without taking the righteousness of Christ along with them. The foolish go without Christ!
- It is not too late for us yet, and many we know in our community. How much time we still have, we don't know. Good for us, that the Lord is present here today with His oil to hand it out to us in abundance. He is the olive tree that was pressed on Calvary and gave oil for all to receive. Receive from Him the Word of forgiveness, receive faith from Him, here and now, and your lamp will shine before God forever. The gifts Jesus brings along for the poor in Spirit are eternal gifts. Let us stock-up on them. Let us listen to Him. Let us soak up His words and be reconciled to God continually. Jesus' words make us wise for salvation. They are the oil which keeps our lamps of faith and good works burning. If you cut down on the teachings of Christ, your faith is in danger of running out, when the waiting gets long.
- Let us not go without oil to meet our bridegroom. He gives His oil freely here on earth, in His Body. He Himself prepares us to meet Him with joy.
- He will take us along to the home He has prepared for us. That is a promise. So let us watch and pray together, not neglecting God's service to us. We live in dangerous times, because post-modernism has no feel for steadfastness and continuity. Faith is supposed to be spontaneous. We need to come back to the basics. Let us practice to enter with Christ, continuously hearing Him rather than practice to hear the bare minimum from Him.
- The Psalm for the day helps us to call out to the Lord appropriately: *"Make haste, O God, to deliver me, O Lord make haste to help me."* **Amen.**

The Lord Jesus Christ says: "Surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all of you." Amen.