

HE IS COMING INDEED

Matthew 25:1-13

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost (Series A)

November 12, 2017

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to Matthew*, chapter 25, verses 1 through 13. It is on page 702 of the pew Bible.

We come now to the last few weeks of the Church Year. Including today, there are three Sundays left before Advent. And these last few Sundays form a little bit of their own liturgical season. You'll notice that all the readings for today—as well as for the next two Sundays—they all have to do with the end times.

Popular teaching on the end times often becomes very complex, but it really doesn't need to be. The basic biblical teaching is taught very simply in the creeds. Jesus is coming again. We don't know when, but he will return in bodily form. Everyone will see him. He will raise all the dead. Then he will judge all mankind. The wicked, including the devil and his demons, will be cast into eternal torment, while God will transform his believing saints and grant them everlasting life in the new creation.

If you still have questions, come to the adult Sunday school class next week. I can't promise to give you all the answers. Jesus couldn't even give his disciples all the answers. But I'll do my best to give you what we do know from Scripture.

In this gospel lesson, Jesus gives us a parable, teaching us that we should always be watching for his glorious return. And this includes being ready to wait for a very long time. Please stand as you are able for the gospel. From Matthew 25, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

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 Afterward 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.”

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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I don't know about you, but I have virtually no patience. Maybe some of you are the same way. I don't know. But whenever I make plans to meet someone, if I get there first, I spend the entire time wondering if they're actually going to come. I am so used to doing whatever I want, exactly when I want to do it, that whenever I have to just stop and wait with nothing to do in the meantime, I lose my mind. So even if the other person is extremely reliable, my mind plays tricks on me.

This happened a couple weeks ago. I made plans to have lunch with a friend. I texted him only about an hour before lunch to set it up, so it wasn't like there was a lot of time for him to forget. Our plans were firm: this specific restaurant at noon. I got there at about 11:58, which is pretty good for me. I got a table for us, and as soon as the clock hit 12:01, I started doubting. Have you ever done that? Is he actually going to come? Did I get the time wrong? Did I get the date wrong? Am I at the wrong restaurant? Did he forget? Did he suddenly decide he doesn't want to be friends anymore? All the possible reasons he might not show up. So even though we had just made these plans about an hour earlier, I was already doubting myself. I started looking through our text messages to make sure I was in the right place at the right time. Then the server came. And it actually took a little bit of faith just to order something to drink, because I wasn't completely certain my friend was really going to come. Was I going to have to go through the embarrassment of telling the server my friend was coming, but then he doesn't come, and I just pay for one beverage and leave? And all these thoughts were going through my head in less time than it just took me to explain this to you.

But you can probably guess what happened next. At about 12:03 my friend walked in. He apologized for being three minutes late, and I said something like, "Oh, it's no problem; I barely noticed." If by, "barely," you mean my brain was totally freaking out, sure.

Now, I'm going to guess that most of you aren't quite as neurotic as I am, but I bet you have some idea what I'm talking about. We don't like waiting. And sometimes, waiting for something can make us doubt whether or not it's actually going to happen. But then the thing happens, just like it was supposed to, and we realize how foolish our doubts were.

So Jesus gives us a parable about waiting. These ten virgins were waiting for the bridegroom to come. Five were wise and five were foolish. The foolish were foolish all along, but their foolishness isn't revealed until the end of the waiting. That's when it becomes apparent that they never really expected the bridegroom to come. They looked the part ... sort of. They were in the right place at the right time, and they had their lamps, but they didn't bring any oil. They were able to fake it for a while, but only until it really mattered. When the cry rang out that the bridegroom had come, their foolishness was revealed. They were caught with no oil. And the best explanation for how this happened, is that they never really expected him to come.

So Jesus tells us to be ready. The point of the parable is, **"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour"** (25:13).

But how do we know Jesus is actually coming back? That's really the issue, isn't it?

The foolish virgins didn't seem to actually believe the bridegroom was coming. And the same thing is true with Jesus. Many people simply do not believe he is coming again. Even in the visible church, there must be some who appear to be ready, but it's only an outward appearance. There may be no faith behind the appearance. They look the part, but don't really

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believe any of it. They're not ready, because they don't really think there's anything to be ready for. Maybe you are even one of them. Maybe you're a skeptic. That's alright. I'm not going to be hard on you. You look at things rationally. You ask, *How do we know Jesus is actually coming back?*

A couple thousand years ago, some guy said he was going to come back for us. Why should we believe him? We would be fools to believe everything we're told. If I told you that rainbow unicorns were going to come to melt all our snow and give us never-ending summer, would you believe me? Probably not. And why not? Because there's no proof. You might wish something like that would happen, but wishful thinking usually doesn't add up to reality.

So if we're supposed to believe that Jesus is coming back, where's the proof? How do we know he's coming? And if he is, will he find us to be foolish or wise? Well, the answer is really the same as how we know anything in the Christian faith. It is because Jesus died and rose from the dead.

Jesus taught the parable of the ten virgins on Tuesday of Holy Week. On Friday of that week he was crucified, and on Sunday he rose from the dead.

So how do we know Jesus is coming again? Because this same Jesus who told us to watch for his coming, is the same Jesus who prophesied that he would be crucified and then rise from the dead. Then he made it happen. And that's the key. If Jesus makes all these promises, but then doesn't follow through on rising from the dead, then we really shouldn't believe any of this.

God calls us to faith. He calls us to believe. But that faith is not a blind leap. It is not irrational. God gives us the proof we need by raising Jesus from the dead ([Acts 17:31](#)). This event of the resurrection is the basis for everything we believe in the Christian faith. How do we know God created the entire cosmos in six days? None of us were there to see it. It's because the same Jesus who treated the entire Old Testament as God's authoritative word died and rose again. How do we know God created male and female and intends for marriage to be permanent? Because the same Jesus who affirmed that specific Scripture ([Gen. 2:24](#); [Matt. 19:5](#)) died and rose again. How do we know our sins are forgiven? Because the same Jesus who promises forgiveness and eternal life died and rose again in order to make it happen. And how do we know Jesus is returning? Because he died and rose again, just like he said he would. The truthfulness of everything in Scripture hinges on this one historical event.

Now I know some of you have heard me talk about this before. You might even be starting to think you could stand here and give this sermon. Good. That's the point. I am going to keep teaching you this until every single one of us are prepared to teach the five foolish virgins what is so foolish about not believing Jesus is coming back. Every Christian should be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in us ([1 Peter 3:15](#)). And the reason is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Our faith is not a blind leap. It is firmly grounded on real, historical events.

On a particular Friday, in a particular city, particular blood was shed. God laid it all on the line. He said, *Alright, here's my Son. Kill him, and see what happens next.* Now if that's the end of it. If Jesus is crucified, only to be laid in a tomb to rot until his body decomposes to the point where it's indistinguishable from dirt, then everything in this book is garbage. It would be worthless, and Christians would be downright pitiful ([1 Cor. 15:19](#)).

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But if the crucifixion isn't the end of it—if Jesus did actually rise from the dead—then we have something else on our hands. For one thing, we would know that his sacrifice for our sins was accepted. And we would also have someone with the authority to speak on matters beyond what we can observe with our five senses. We would have someone with the authority to tell us about things in the past, things in the future, and even things in the kingdom of heaven.

And this is one of the unique things about Christianity. We're not talking about secret things done in a corner or some random person's private revelation from God. We are talking about Jesus making the public claim that he would be crucified and then rise from the dead. Then we have him actually following through on it. And he didn't do it secretly. That's the key. We have him appearing to dozens, and even hundreds of eyewitnesses—eyewitnesses who wrote it all down for us, spread the report all over the world, and stuck to their convictions, even in the face of death.

We believe Jesus is coming back because he proved himself to be God in a very public way. So we are, in fact, wise to be watching and waiting for him to return, even if it means suffering and ridicule. It's one of those things where we may feel insecure while we wait. It may seem like we've been waiting for a long time, so we start to second guess whether or not it's really supposed to take this long. So we go back and look at Jesus' words. Did he really say that he's coming? Is it really supposed to take this long?

We look at a parable like the one before us this morning, and we see that, yes, Jesus taught us to be ready at any time, and he also taught us to be ready to wait, even if it means waiting for a very long time.

That's what happened to the ten virgins. These ten virgins are kind of like the bridesmaids. In ancient Israel, weddings were big, long celebrations that could last for several days. These people really knew how to party.

But first the groom would prepare the dwelling place for his new family. Sometimes he would even build a house for his bride. Then, at the appointed time, he and his friends would go to the bride's parents' house to fetch her and the bridesmaids. Then they would have this processional to the wedding party. It was usually dark at this time, so that's what the lamps were for.

Now, in the parable, all ten virgins bring a lamp, but only five of them bring oil. Either they don't know that lamps need oil, or they do know it, but just don't think the groom is actually coming. I think they know all about lamps, but they don't really have any faith in the groom.

I imagine a rather homely looking bride—that would accurately represent the Church—I imagine a rather homely looking bride telling her ten friends that this really handsome guy she met on the internet is coming to marry her. Five of her friends believe her. At first, they look like the foolish ones. The other five are more skeptical, but they don't want to hurt her feelings, so they agree to be in the wedding party. Then they can at least be there to console this heart-broken young girl. They bring their lamps, because they know they have to look supportive, but they don't really think they're going to need any oil. So they don't bother with that expense.

It starts to get late. The skeptical five are looking wiser and wiser as the minutes turn into hours and the groom still hasn't come. Eventually they all fall asleep.

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And we remember that “sleep” is Jesus’ special word for “death.” So we learn from the parable that, not only should we be ready for Jesus to return right now, but we must also be ready for him not to return right now. In fact, we should be ready for him to wait until sometime after our deaths, when we, like the ten virgins, fall asleep.

But then, at midnight, when no one expects it, the cry rings out, **“Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.”** (25:6) This is like the trumpet sound when Jesus returns. And then everyone wakes up. Not just the wise, but also the foolish. Other passages also teach that it is not merely Christians who will rise from the dead, but all mankind (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15).

Then the foolish virgins realize they were wrong. They’re caught off guard, so they ask the wise virgins for some oil. But the wise only have enough for themselves. The foolish virgins have to go and try to buy some, but it’s too late. It’s not like the bridegroom is another hour away. He is here now. The time to go is now. They frantically try to get ready at the last minute, but it’s useless. Their foolishness is exposed.

But for the five wise virgins, the arrival of the bridegroom is pure joy. They are vindicated before the skeptics and rewarded for their faith in the bridegroom. They get to experience the joy of the wedding feast.

It’s not like they were so much different from the foolish virgins. They simply expected the bridegroom to come, so they brought oil. The oil is simply a picture of faith. We trust that Jesus will fulfill his promise.

As Christians, our glorious hope is that day when Christ will come again. As we wait for this day, our lives are often filled with suffering, shame, and even death. We may be ridiculed for our faith in Jesus Christ. The world calls us foolish for believing some guy from two thousand years ago is going to come back. But as surely as he bore our sins in his body, carried them into death, and rose again triumphantly, he will come again in glory. He will raise the dead. And he will grant everlasting life to all who believe in him. For now our faith may waver. We may even doubt his promises and wonder if we are the fools. But our faith will be confirmed when he proves himself faithful.

His sacrifice has removed our sins and made us worthy for his kingdom. He has even forgiven the guilt we incur when we doubt him. And he will remove all doubt when he takes his stand on the earth once again.

“He will wipe away every tear from [your] eyes, and death shall be no more, [no more cancer, no more disease, no more war,] neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore” (Rev. 21:4).

“He who testifies to these things says, **‘Surely I am coming soon.’** Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! “The grace of the Lord Jesus we with [you] all. Amen.” (Rev. 22:20-21)