

Text: Matthew 25:1-13

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

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation today is the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew the twenty-fifth chapter verses one through thirteen.

Boys and girls, I pray that you are doing well today. Have you ever seen a wedding. A lot of planning goes into weddings. Depending on how elaborate you want the day, preparation can take months. Can you imagine an engaged couple on their wedding day if there was *no preparation*—securing the pastor, sending out invitations, finding and altering the dress, planning the food, purchasing the clothing, or getting the marriage license? What would happen if the day came and no one was ready? I'm guessing you'd see one upset bride, and the mother of the bride wouldn't be too happy either!

In our *Gospel* today, Jesus tells a parable about a wedding feast, but the wedding feast of which Jesus speaks is of eternal proportions! Everything we need to understand in this parable is in the first verse:

“THEN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN
WILL BE LIKE TEN VIRGINS WHO TOOK THEIR LAMPS
AND WENT TO MEET THE BRIDEGROOM.”

How does this verse help us understand this parable? Ponder that question as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

1. Kingdom of Heaven

This parable is about *the kingdom of heaven*. In this parable, the “kingdom of heaven” is the same as “the marriage feast.” This can raise a lot of questions for us as we try to understand this parable. What is this kingdom of heaven? Where is this kingdom of heaven? Is this a place where we go when we die? How do we get there from here? How is this *kingdom of heaven* a *marriage feast*? Is being at this heavenly marriage feast something you're interested in? If it's a feast, what will we eat and drink there? These are all very good questions; I'm glad you asked!

The kingdom of heaven is *wherever* Christ is. We first see the kingdom of heaven back in the Garden of Eden, where God *dwelt* with

Adam and Eve, where everything was perfect; man was holy, and there was no sin and no death. So wherever Christ is, there is the kingdom of heaven. So where is the kingdom of heaven today? Is it, is he, far removed on a golden throne watching from a distance? No!

He is here in his Word. He is here in the waters of Holy Baptism. He is here in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. He lives and serves here in the world through every Christian, as St. Paul says, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

And where Christ is—There is the return to Eden—forgiveness of sin, new life, resurrection, peace and comfort, hope and salvation, restoration as we are made new and freed from sin. *And there, where Christ is, where the kingdom of heaven is, there is the marriage feast of the Lamb!* It is this kingdom to which Christ invites *you*. He invites you to be his. He invites you to receive his gifts of new life. He invites to take you out of sin and death by giving you forgiveness and eternal life. He invites you out of hell and into his eternal marriage feast.

But as long as Christians live in this broken, fallen world, we will see only a foretaste of the greater feast to come. It is true that Christ is with us even now, but it is not a reality that we fully see at present, as Paul says, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor 13:12). Or in the words of the beautiful post-Communion collect, “You have given us a foretaste of the feast to come in the Holy Supper of Your Son’s body and blood. Keep us firm in the true faith throughout our days of pilgrimage that, on the day of His coming, we may, together with all Your saints, celebrate the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end” (*LSB*, p 166). And while the whole world moans and groans in this sin-filled, suffering, and fallen world, the *kingdom of heaven* is God’s promise and rescue to all who repent and believe in him.

2. 10 Virgins Foolish and Wise

This parable is about the kingdom of heaven and *ten virgins*. These ten virgins are like bridesmaids. In the days of Jesus, the couple’s parents would have arranged the marriage. As the wedding day drew nearer, part of the joy and anticipation of the festivities included the

bridegroom coming to meet his bride. It would be a surprise when he would come. He could come in the daytime or at midnight. And for the bride—she was to be ready whenever he came, as her bridesmaids kept her company and helped her stay awake for the time he would arrive.

In Jesus' parable, five of the bridesmaids (virgins) were *wise*, and five of them were *foolish* (vv 1–4). In the event that the bridegroom delayed his coming, and if the hour got late, all ten of the bridesmaids would need lamps and therefore would need oil to keep their lamps burning. The wise virgins were prepared and ready for when the bridegroom came. They had ample oil to keep filling their lamps for whenever he might appear. These wise virgins are the believers in Jesus Christ, even to this day. Sinners—yes, repentant—yes, believers in Jesus Christ—yes! The foolish bridesmaids were not prepared, and they were not ready for the grand moment when the bridegroom came (vv 5–10). They ran out of oil, so when the bridegroom arrived, these foolish virgins were off trying to find oil to fill their lamps. When they came back, the doors of the feast were shut, and they were not allowed to enter (vv 11–12). These foolish virgins are unbelievers in this world. They would love to go to the eternal feast on the Last Day. They may even know a little bit about this Jesus. But they care more for the world and themselves. Sinners—yes, repentant—no, believers in Jesus Christ—no!

This parable is about the kingdom of heaven and ten virgins with *lamps of oil*. The lamps are *faith*. The lamps of the foolish virgins are filled with one thing. The lamps of the wise virgins are filled with yet another thing.

The lamps of the *foolish* virgins are filled with anything and everything *except* Jesus Christ. If faith were an oil container, with what does the world fill it? In what does the world put its faith? What does the world believe in and fear and love and trust above all else? What is it that fills *your* faith? This world's foolish people fill their faith with belief in other gods: Allah, wealth, self, government, Hollywood, sports heroes, their own idols. This world's foolish people fill their faith with total apathy—not knowing what they believe, not caring that they don't believe in anything, taking a chance that if there is some god out there he'll let everyone in to whatever this afterlife is. Some of these foolish

virgins may be downright vile and evil in their outward words and actions, even mocking God and persecuting those who truly believe in him. Others may be good upright citizens who are humanitarians and polite and kind, but their faith is *not* filled with that “oil” of which Jesus speaks in our parable today. They also will not enter the marriage feast. The doors will be slammed shut, and they will hear its hollow ring on the other side.

“Foolish virgins” of our day are not fazed by the announcement of the coming of the Bridegroom. Like those in our *Old Testament Reading* today from Amos, they believe in their own deeds, and they are satisfied in their own righteousness, saying, “Bring on the coming of the Lord.” But they will not enter the Kingdom because their faith was not filled with Christ (v 13).

Which leads us to lamps of the *wise* virgins. Like the foolish virgins, the wise virgins are sinners (like you and me); they don’t deserve to enter God’s marriage feast any more than do the foolish virgins. But something is different about the vessels of faith of these wise virgins compared to those of the foolish ones. ***The vessels of faith of the wise virgins are filled with Christ.*** Consider Luther’s words, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith” (explanation of the Third Article). The true faith is that of the wise virgins; the Holy Spirit feeds and fills our faith with Christ, making us holy and keeping us in the one true faith.

In this parable, Jesus is teaching about the Last Day, the Day of Judgment, when the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, will return and call the faithful, repentant believers to the eternal marriage feast. And when he comes, O wise believers, you will have been filled with Christ, which will mean you *are prepared*. Your lamps are filled with Christ in his Word, which has sustained your faith through life’s trials and temptations and given healing and forgiveness to you in your sinful life. It has strengthened your faith to endure even the day of persecution. Your lamps are filled with Christ in his font, where faith in him was created, you first entered into his kingdom, he washes you clean of your

sins every day, and where he shields and wards off Satan and his constant deadly attacks against you. Your lamps are filled with Christ at this Table, where Christ enters your body and your soul to forgive your sin, to strengthen your faith in this difficult, fallen world, and where he promises you a place at the greater feast to come. On the Last Day, O Christian, your Bridegroom comes to rescue you and take you into his eternal kingdom, where there is no more death or sin or sickness, no more crying or tears of sorrow or despair or disaster or pain or suffering. And when he comes, no matter when he comes, your lamps, your faith, your lives will be filled with Christ—the “one thing needful.” These are the gifts of those who believe in him and whose faith is filled with Christ.

3. Bridegroom

This parable is about the kingdom of heaven and ten virgins with their lamps of oil, but most of all, this parable is about the *Bridegroom, Jesus Christ!* After all, what good is a bride without the bridegroom! Jesus as the Bridegroom pictures the beautiful relationship he has with us. God often used this image to picture his relationship with Israel in the Old Testament. Yahweh, the Lord, was the Bridegroom, Israel the bride. Then Israel, God says, committed adultery by worshiping idols, so that God speaks of divorcing her (Is 50:1; Jer 3:8). But we also remember the prophet Hosea. God had him marry Gomer, a harlot. And when she was adulterous, God instructed Hosea to seek and receive her back.

We are an adulterous people, even we “wise virgins,” as daily we go chasing after other gods, as we forget about the true God, as we fail to love our neighbor. God must divorce us; we must be separated from him forever. He can no longer be the holy Bridegroom of a rebellious people, such a sin-stained Bride. But the Bridegroom comes to be divorced from God in our place. That’s what’s going on when Jesus hangs on the cross and says, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He buys back his Bride, you and me, with his own blood, and he presents us to his Father as radiant, white, holy, sinless, and glorious. As we heard in last week’s first reading. The angel says to John in Revelation, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where

have they come?” John says, “Sir, you know.” The angel says, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:13–14). See what the Bridegroom has done for you? He makes you his forgiven, holy Bride fit for the kingdom of heaven, prepared for the marriage feast of the Lamb. This parable is about the Bridegroom who prepares you for the marriage feast on the Last Day as he fills your lamp of faith with himself—his death and his resurrection—and, dear Bride of Christ, in him you are ready and prepared to enter the feast . . . no matter when he comes.

Conclusion: The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. In these last days, we believe that “He will come to judge the living and the dead.” Christ will return with angels and trumpets; he comes to take his holy Bride home, to be with him forever. We need not fear that day of his return, for we are filled with Christ, made holy, forgiven, redeemed, prepared *just for that day*. And while we know *right now* we are his holy Bride, children of the kingdom of heaven, receiving even now a foretaste of the feast to come in this glorious meal . . . yet we hear the announcement of our Lord’s invitation as he says, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And we say, “Even so, Lord Jesus, quickly come!” And he says to you, dear holy Bride of Christ, “Yes, I am coming soon.” And those who were ready went in.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.