

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
November 16, 2014**

Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying!

- 1. Understand Jesus' parable**
- 2. Learn Jesus' lessons**

Hymns: 206 – 728 – Distribution: 207, 313 –
Closing: 220 (vv. 1,4)

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Matthew 25:1-13 –

At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!"

Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out."

"No," they replied, "there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves."

But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

Later the others also came. "Sir! Sir!" they said. "Open the door for us!"

But he replied, "I tell you the truth, I don't know you."

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

I'll admit it. It's happened to me. It hasn't happened often and it hasn't happened lately, but it has happened. Perhaps it's happened to you, too?

What I'm talking about is this: There have been a few days in my life when I have either

forgotten to turn on the alarm button on my clock radio or have hit the snooze and fell back asleep. I slept on until my mental alarm clock went off. Then I rolled over to look at the time, and the clock said that it was a mere 15 minutes or so before I was scheduled to be at something right off the bat that morning. Has it ever happened to you?

Consequently, a flurry of activity happened: Leaping out of bed, sprinting to the bathroom to splash water, grabbing clothes out of the closet and a brush out of the drawer. Since I have to have coffee in the morning, it also included a 90-second banquet of cold, instant coffee and a banana. The flurry concluded with a last look in the mirror and a dash to whatever was on the docket that morning.

If you've ever been through that process, you know what a shock it is to wake up in that way and be unprepared for the day's schedule. And you also will relate well to the parable Jesus teaches us today. We are in the End Times season of the Church Year. The End Times season – conveniently located at the end of the Church Year – focuses on the end of this present world. We see this clearly in the Gospel lesson for today, which we will meditate on in this sermon message. As Jesus teaches us lessons in The Parable of the Ten Virgins, we focus on the theme we sang before: ***"Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying!"***

1. Understand Jesus' parable

Let's take a closer look at the story that Jesus told his followers: *"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!"*

It would be good to know the context in which those young ladies found themselves. Jewish wedding customs in Jesus' day were a bit different from ours. Marriages involved a few

steps before the union of the man and woman was complete and their life together began:

1. Negotiation – The parents of a young man and woman might do this negotiating, or if old enough, the interested male might negotiate with the young lady's father. A price had to be agreed upon as a gift to the young woman's family.
2. Betrothal – After an agreement was reached, it had to be sealed. This would involve the money being delivered to the young lady's father and the contract details being finalized. Then the young man and the young woman would share a cup of wine to indicate their acceptance of the marriage proposal. This ceremony was called the "betrothal," and this made the contract final.
3. Preparation – However, the man and woman did not begin living together or consummate the marriage at that point. Rather, the groom would leave to prepare the home for his new bride. This might take months, and his father was the one who had to approve the work as being completed satisfactorily. (This was the point that Mary and Joseph were at when she was found to be "with child")
4. Then came the time that our sermon text speaks of. The groom would come with his friends to fetch the bride and her friends from her childhood home. It appears that there could have been a bit of a surprise and fun connected with this, although the families most certainly knew that the event was coming. When the men had successfully secured the bride, they would process to the new home. There were no more ceremonies held such as we have with a wedding service; rather, the consummation of the marriage would take place and feasting that would last up to seven days.

Keeping that in mind, we now ask, "What was the problem in Jesus' parable?" He said, *"Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'*

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

People sometimes make too many points of comparison with this parable and ask:

- What does the lamp stand for?
- What is the flame?
- What is the wick?
- What kind of lamp was it, a clay vessel or a torch? (We don't know)
- Was the fact that the young ladies were sleeping wrong?
- Could they really have bought oil at midnight?
- And why wouldn't the bridal couple let them process without a lamp, or let them in the door later on?

Parables normally have one main lesson to teach, and we must make sure that we zero in on the proper place. The bridegroom was late in coming. It appears that lateness on wedding days is nothing new. **And the bridesmaids who were supposed to accompany the bride were not prepared. They did not bring oil for their lamps. That was the problem, and that is Jesus' point. Five virgins were fools. They did not bring oil for their lamps. And because they were not prepared, they were excluded from the joyful wedding feast.**

2. Learn Jesus' lessons

Now that we know the background and the main point of Jesus' parable about the end times of this world, it's time to learn the lessons for our lives that he would never want us to forget.

The first lesson is learned when we identify who the virgins are. Who are they? The virgins are here in church today. The young ladies that Jesus is describing are present in the Christian church. We are not talking about the church vs. the world in this parable. We are talking about you and me and everyone here today. We are talking about professed Christians in churches. These young ladies were well aware that the bridegroom was coming. And they were awaiting his return. We profess to be believers. We know that our bridegroom is coming. We have heard and learned the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. We thank him, sing his praises, and wait for him. We know that Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. And some people in the church are wise, and in the end some will prove to be fools.

Therefore, we need to have oil when he returns! What is the oil? To answer that, we need to learn what it takes to be admitted to the wedding supper of the Lamb. The Bible makes that clear:

- *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).*
- The Apostle Paul said to the jailor at Philippi: *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).*

Genuine, living, active faith is the oil that is needed on Judgment Day when Christ returns in his glory.

As we think about that, we must admit that there are dangers out there to our faith. Another parable Jesus taught – The Sower and the Seed – illustrated that well. The Word is sown into the world and some falls on thorny ground where the worries and cares of the world quenched faith. Or it fell on the path where the devil snatched it away. Or it fell on the stony ground where faith sprang up but then withered and died under the hard times of the scorching heat of the sun. **There are great dangers out there to your faith and to my faith!** Perhaps you know of people who have

fallen from the faith during the course of their life and have no oil?

And in the end, salvation is non-transferable. You cannot give your oil to another, and you cannot get it from another. How many people on the Last Day might plead to God:

- “My grandma was a pious Christian lady!”
- “My uncle was a minister!”
- “My family’s been members of a church for generations!”

And the Lord says, “I don’t know you. Depart from me.”

This is important because we must admit that we don’t know when the time of Christ’s return will be. It could be anytime. Jesus said in Matthew 24, *“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”* We Christians who wait do not know when he will return. This could be the last church service you ever attend, because Christ might summon you before next weekend comes.

His summoning us could even come when he personally calls us out of this world. And that could be anytime as well. Last week a man named Gary found this out. Gary was doing his job in Jersey City. He was delivering sheetrock. It was Monday morning, not even 9:00 a.m. Gary had stopped to talk with another worker in a pickup truck at the job site. A construction worker on the 50th floor had his tape measure slip from his work belt – just a one-pound tape measure! Gary had a hard hat – in his truck. The tape measure fell 50 stories, ricocheted off a piece of construction equipment about ten feet off the ground and hit Gary in the head. Before 10:00 a.m. Gary was pronounced dead. He probably thought he was only going to be there for a short while and what were the chances of something going wrong? But he didn’t even see it coming when God summoned him from this life.

Therefore, we need to be prepared. We need to have oil. A priority in your life needs to be the nurture of your faith and avoiding the attacks of the Evil One. How can we do so? First, the way that God supplies and fills our oil

is through his tools, the Means of Grace. Through his Word and his sacraments the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith. 2 Timothy 3 tells us, *“From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

The connection you have to God’s Word and sacraments is vital. Worship in the Lord’s house and use of his Word in your daily life cannot be stressed enough. This feeds our faith.

This is why a pastor gets very concerned when a sheep in his flock is not staying well connected to the Word and sacraments. It is not a good trend and does not re-supply his oil. Regularity in worship is vital, for with our faulty minds we need constant instruction and reminding. Do you remember the topic from last Sunday’s sermon?; or the sermon series that we followed through the summer Sundays? Do you remember all those themes? Do you remember the Scripture message from last spring’s Confirmation sermon?; or from our Lenten series? Our minds forget, and need constant connection with the Word.

Then we also need to be vigilant. We need to ward off the attacks the devil and the world around us, who would like us to lose our faith and lose it all:

- *“I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown” (Revelation 3:11).*
- *“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith” (1 Peter 5:8,9).*
- *“Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the*

readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Ephesians 6:13-18).

Finally, the beauty of all this is that we see that the one who is a follower of Christ, who is connected to the spiritual supply of oil and is waiting eagerly for the Savior will not be snatched from his hand. The Lord’s grip on us will not be broken by the powers of darkness. They cannot wrest us away from him, although we certainly can wander off ourselves.

Therefore, may God forgive us when we have been less than vigilant in waiting for him and have neglected our spiritual watchfulness. May he turn us again to the cross of Christ, where he paid for the sins of the world and forgiven us. And may our look at the ten virgins in Jesus’s parable renew our vigilance to keep watch, for his return will be at any time! Amen.