

Let us pray: With today being the final Sunday of the church year, Lord please continue to encourage and sustain us. We grow weary as the winter approaches and as we plod through this life... help us Lord. Keep us steadfast in Your Word; Help us to focus on You; and Keep us ever vigilant for the return of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Grace: God's undeserved love for each and every one of us. Mercy: God forgiving us our sin for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ. And peace: peace of heart, peace of mind, peace with God. All of these are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew the twenty-fifth chapter beginning at the first verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ²

"Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. ³ "Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, ⁴

"but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. ⁵ "But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. ⁶

"And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' ⁷ "Then all those virgins arose 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, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' ¹⁰ "And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. ¹¹ "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open

to us!' ¹² "But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹³ "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

Today marks the end of the Church Year and thus the End of End Times. Spending three weeks in the End Times is often more than enough for the average parishioner to be ready to move on to Advent. "Let's stop with the doom and gloom and let's move on to the baby Jesus stuff." And so it is with many of us here. We've been coming to church all year, we know the end is coming, we know

Christ is coming back, we know to be ready... but we don't put it into practice.

"But pastor, Jesus told these stories 2,000 years ago, obviously they matter but they're not completely pertinent." And so thought the person who died last night... you know the one who wasn't right with God, the one who lacked faith, the one who would 'make things right later.' Jesus came back for them, and He will come back for us. Jesus will come back to this earth and either we will be alive or we will rise when He does, but regardless that does not lessen our need to ***Watch!***

In the text for the Last Sunday of the church year Jesus is telling us a parable. Again, a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Within the parable each vital element has one corresponding point. As an example, in this parable Jesus talks about the "Kingdom of heaven." And just what is this

kingdom of heaven? Well, according to our Confessions, ***“the church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ.”*** So for our parable today the kingdom of God is the church on this earth. So, Jesus is telling a story, a parable, about the church on this earth and how it is comprised of ten virgins who are awaiting the coming bridegroom so that they can go to the party, the feast, with Him.

Now, who are the virgins? Well, if we remember back to our look at the 144,000 in the book of Revelation, we remember that the number 10 is an important number in the Bible, and when used figuratively it denotes completeness. Thus, the Ten Virgins, is the complete church... for the Kingdom of heaven, the church, is like ten, the complete number, virgins. So, we are talking about the entire church on earth... and that is where we run into fun things.

For we know that this side of heaven, the church is not the “Church.” We know that there are many in this world who claim to be part of the church... and they are not. We know that there are many who claim adherence to Christ and His word; yet, they have never opened a Bible and have no clue what Jesus says. We know that this side of heaven the ‘church’ will twist and strain and do gymnastics to get God’s word to say what they want it to say. And we know this is all true about the very people sitting here right now.

We are not a perfect church by any means. We look at God’s word and when we have a favorite portion we hold to it and make it work to our advantage, but when one speaks against us we just brush that portion aside. God tells me not to steal, and He’s right no one better steal from me... but so what if I steal from my employer with that extra break or if I steal from my kids by watching

television instead of being with them or if I steal from my spouse by giving my love to another... But people better not steal from me.

And so at times we too have a warped sense of God and His Word. We are just like those foolish virgins. We claim to have this deep and inerrant love of Jesus and all that He stood for... but when we are not clinging to Him, when we are not faithful to Him, when we have no faith in Him; what good is loving Him?

For, you see, those foolish virgins were those people who cling to the church and who have the same outward act as everyone else. They walk through that door. They put money in the offering plate. They sing the hymns. They support the pastor. They shake hands. They record the services. They help out in everything... but they have no faith. Those foolish virgins 'belong' to the church,

but they do not belong to Christ. They love the outward association, but they lack faith in Christ... they lack oil.

And so, the kingdom of heaven, the church on this earth is comprised of those who are foolish, who lack faith, and those who are wise, who have faith... and yet a very common feeling impacts us all: complacency. We all get complacent in this life. We have lived it long enough, we know the ins and outs. We know what to expect. We know what we are doing next week, next year even. We know... and we get complacent. "Yep, I've read that Jesus is coming back, but that is not for a long time." It won't be during my life, instead I am going to live, get old, and die.

And do not suppose that you or I am immune to it. I remember in Seminary a professor asking us if we were all ready to go to heaven tomorrow, and not many were

ready. We wanted families. We wanted to be pastors. We wanted to live more... we were not looking for Christ, we were looking for ourselves, and we had grown complacent. And so, both the wise and the foolish virgins grew tired and fell asleep. And so both the faithful and the unfaithful Christians grow tired of waiting and fall asleep.

And yet, the cry is being sounded once again, "The bridegroom is coming!" And those who have faith, those who trust in Christ will spring to action and be ready... while the foolish will not. Those who know that Jesus lived a perfect life for them, will forsake themselves and put their faith in Christ. Those who know Jesus suffered and died for them will not allow their pride and their complacency to get in the way of their Savior Jesus Christ. Those who know that Jesus Christ rose from the dead for them, will not allow end to come without knowing

that they will be departing with Jesus Christ to that great party.

For through faith in Jesus Christ, through that oil, we are able to light our lamps and go with the bridegroom into the great feast. With oil in our lamps, with faith in our hearts, we are able to cling to our bridegroom who is coming back for us. No, we do not know the hour or the day, but we know He is coming back for us. And as we wait, as we 'sleep' at times just like the disciples in Gethsemane, praise be to God that He keeps that oil in us and near to us. For that oil, that faith, is placed into us at our baptism; that faith is strengthened when we read and hear God's word, and that oil is purified every time we partake of Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Yes, through the word and sacraments of our God we know that when Christ returns He is returning for each and every one of us. And through faith in Him, we will

be like those wise virgins who accompany the bridegroom to the great feast in heaven.

Yet, for those who lack faith, for those who do not have the oil, when the bridegroom comes there will be great sorrow and the doors of heaven will be closed with no chance of entry... and thus Jesus warns us, ***“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”*** During this life, we need to be constantly on guard for we do not know when Jesus is coming back... but isn't that all the more reason to be alert and watching.

Dear friends in Christ, the End Times portion of the church year is now over. As we begin to enter a new church year next week, let us not seek to look too far ahead. We need to remember that Jesus is coming and that He warns us to be ready for Him. During this life, though, we will grow complacent; but never let that complacency

rid you of your oil, the oil that God has given to you, that faith which assures you that heaven is yours because of your Savior Jesus Christ.

And at the end of this church year, I will leave you with the words of Johann Gerhard, ***“Be awake so that we be admonished to relinquish the sleep of self-assurance; so that we entrench ourselves in steadfast preparation; and so that every hour we await with joy and longing the future coming of our Lord to judge.”***

Thanks be to God that the End is coming so that I can be all the more vigilant for Jesus' coming also. Thanks be to God for reminding me in His word to be watching. And thanks be to God for supplying my oil, my faith, so that I can be like those wise virgins who go into the feast with the bridegroom.

Dear friends, Watch... for Jesus is coming.
Thanks be to God. Amen.