

Written Copy: Matthew 25:10-13 “Got Oil?”

Proper 27 – 23rd Sunday @ Pentecost

Sunday, November 8th, 2020

Text: Matthew 25:10-13

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.

Exegetical Statement

Jesus tells a parable to illustrate what His reign and rule will be like on the day when He returns and we are welcomed into the “Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end” = the Last Day when we are welcomed into eternal life. The groom is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The virgins or the bridesmaids are the members of His visible Church, all who confess with their mouths’ faith in Christ as Lord. The oil represents all the ways Jesus’ Spirit provides to keep us in faith and ready for His return. We are the bridesmaids awaiting the glorious celebration of His return. But not all who call themselves the Church will be ready. His arrival is delayed. Life stretches out for us, with all the problems, temptations, and our inherent focus on life in this world at the expense of our place in the new heaven and earth to come. When Christ returns, our when He comes for us in our death, there will be no time to ready ourselves. Those who are like the foolish bridesmaids are Christian who do not see the importance of keeping their faith strong through Word and Sacrament involvement. The wise bridesmaids are those who saw it prudent to have an ample supply of oil, to make use of all the opportunities provided by the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace to sustain and strengthen faith. Even though, like the foolish, they nod off, and find themselves focused on things other than Jesus’ return, the Spirit supplied reserve of oil means their lamp of faith will be shining strong on that Last Day. Those who let their faith slip away will have no time to rekindle it. But we who are sealed in Baptismal faith that had been kept strong despite temptation and suffering will enter into the joyous celebration of the Marriage Feast of the Lamb for eternity

Focus Statement:

Jesus wants you, and me, and all men to be in attendance at His Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end. He has sent out the invitation in the Gospel Message, along with the lamp of faith so we are ready whenever He returns. His Spirit working through the Means of Grace keeps our lamp of faith well supplied with baptismal grace. So that even if we are not thinking about His return when it happens, we are sealed in the faith that makes us ready. We will be welcomed into that feast on the Last Day

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

We do not know the day when Christ returns, but we do know there will be a delay of unknown length, long enough that we will nod off in our attempt to remain focused on His return. Left to ourselves the lamp of faith will run out of oil, and our death and His return will find us in the dark and locked out of the eternal celebration that is the Marriage Feast.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Take advantage the opportunities abounding in Word and Sacrament for you to keep your supply of faith well stocked, so that Christ’s delay and all the distractions of this world don’t leave us unprepared for His return whenever that may be.

Subject Sentence: The Spirit provides oil for lamp of faith

Introduction

Remember the “Got Milk” ad campaign?

Show Got Milk Video

For those of you reading this transcript copy, let me give you a rundown on this commercial. It begins with a man walking along the sidewalk talking on his cell phone. After a cordial greeting to one of his employees he unceremoniously fires him. As he laughs in evil derision, he steps off the curb and into the path of an oncoming Semi. The next thing he knows he appears to be a room all decked out in white. A voice is saying, “Welcome to eternity”. He spies a plate of huge chocolate chip cookies, big as a serving platter. He takes a bite, laughs, and remarks to himself “Heaven!”. Continuing to munch on his huge cookie he walks over to a refrigerator that appears to be well stocked with milk cartons. He grabs one...and its empty. He grabs one after another, but all of them are empty. You then see him with a very worried look on his face asking, “Wait a minute. Where am I?” The commercial fades out with the “got milk” slogan going up in flames.

Now running out of milk is not something I look forward to. It’s usually one of the basic staples I check before I go to the store. But in this day and age it’s certainly not the end of the world. Especially living right here, where Meijer’s is open until midnight. And if its past midnight you could probably find a 24-hour gas station that sells milk. And most certainly running out of milk is not going to land you in eternal hell. But what about oil? Oil for your lamp? What happens when you run out of that? In Jesus’ parable it means being locked out of the ‘Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end’. What should it mean to you and to me this day? What is Jesus’ warning us, His Church, about in this parable?

Jesus’ Parable

In your Bibles it’s not called the “Got Oil?” parable. It’s probably called “The Ten Virgins”, or perhaps “The Wise and Foolish Virgins”. The setting is Tuesday of Holy Week. Jesus has just left the Temple in Jerusalem for the last time. As His disciples remarked about the beauty and majesty of the construction of it, He warns that there will come a day when **(Matthew 24:2) "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."** Following this they head off to the Mt. of Olives where Jesus begins a lengthy discourse about what must happen between the time He ascends to the Father and the time when He returns again on the Last Day. Along with describing the temptations, persecutions, and cosmic upheavals that the Church will endure between now and then, He also emphasizes that no one will know when that day will be, and that it will come unexpectedly. So, they need to be ready. He tells this parable we are studying today to illustrate this.

His previous kingdom parables presented earlier in Matthew began “**The kingdom of heaven is like**”, and proceeded to reveal what the hidden reality of Jesus’ reigning, ruling, and working to bring people to faith is like now in our day. But this parable begins with Jesus saying “**Then, the kingdom of heaven will be like...**” Jesus is revealing the reality of what His return on the Last Day will be like for those who have been called to faith, those who have been called by the Gospel to attend that eternal marriage feast.

These virgins or maidens have all been invited. They know that the bridegroom will be coming. They prepare for his arrival by grabbing their lamps and lighting them, so they are ready to follow the bridegroom when he passes by. Picture a triumphal procession, or a parade if you will. This one seems not to start at the normal expected time, but at a very late hour. The maidens are waiting with lamps lit, but the groom is delayed. Time passes. All 10 nod off and fall asleep. Their lamps go out. Then, all of a sudden, the cry comes to their ears, “The bridegroom is coming! Get up! Relite your lamps and be ready to join in the joyous celebratory procession to the wedding hall. It’s the moment you’ve been waiting for!” All come awake and lite their lamps.

As they rub the sleep from their eyes, they trim the wick of their lamps by removing the crusty burnt pieces and extended fresh wick, which they then lite. But 5 of them, the foolish ones, find their lamps won’t light. When they try to light them, they just fizzle out. They’ve run out of oil. In desperation they turn to the other five, the wise ones, and ask to borrow some of their supply. These wise ones have brought an extra supply of oil, which is the reason why they are called the “wise ones”. They realized the hour would be late, and that they didn’t know how long it will be before he comes. The lamps themselves only hold so much oil. They knew they would need a reserve and so brought extra in a flask. While they brought enough for their own purposes, there’s not enough to cover for the foolishness of the other five. The wise ones are not being mean or selfish. Sharing their supply of oil would mean that they would run out as well as the foolish maidens. All 10 of them would have darkened lamps and the joyous procession would turn into a disaster. The only chance the foolish virgins seem to have is to do what they should’ve done earlier in preparation for this most important event, run quickly and try to get more from a dealer. But alas, in that day and age, there are no Meijer’s open until midnight, no 24-hour gas stations. And even if there were, there is no time. Just as the 5 foolish virgins take off to find more oil, the bridegroom arrives. Those who are prepared with enough oil join the procession and are welcomed into the banquet hall. And after that the door is shut.

The five foolish virgins appear on the scene. We are not told if they found any oil or not. But they knock and cry out pleading with the groom for entrance. **(Matthew 25:12) But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.'** This seems on the face of things very mean and very cold, especially out of the mouth of our loving and forgiving Jesus. When our kids were young and attending Lutheran school we had to drive them in every morning. One of them struggled with getting up on time and being ready. Susan warned them that if they weren't ready, she would leave them behind, but this warning seemed to fall on deaf ears with this particular one. So, one morning, when I had the morning off, Susan told this slow to respond child that she was not going to keep waiting and make the other two late. She is leaving. This child would have to wait until their Father (me) was out of the shower and dressed so I could take this one to school. That would make this child extremely late, and the thought of being that tardy did the trick. I heard a cry of despair. Then with hair not quite fully brushed out, and shirt not fully tucked into the pants, carrying shoes in hand, toothbrush still in the mouth, this child went running out the door. The child found their Mom had not left but was waiting in the drive with the car running. Susan waited to give this child a chance, and to teach a lesson, not to crush their heart. That's the kind of loving mercy we would expect to find in Jesus' parable. The foolish maidens messed up. Don't they deserve forgiveness? Yet they are locked out of the banquet hall forever! Where is the grace and forgiveness that is typical of our Lord and Savior?

What It Means for You

This is a harsh and cold ending. And Jesus wants to leave us with a worried look on our face and a knot in our stomach. He ends this parable with a warning for you, for me, and for all who have been called into His kingdom, His Church. His grace and mercy come to us in an abundant supply. But if we take advantage of His grace, using it as an excuse to sin, as an excuse to please our sinful hearts at the expense of His suffering and death, we are to know that there will come a day when that supply will be cut off. On the last day, if you have run out of oil for your lamp, you will be locked out for eternity!

In this parable, the Bridegroom is Jesus, and the 10 virgins are us, His Church. We have been invited to the wedding feast through the Gospel Message. But we are far from being like pure maidens in the spiritual sense. We have worshiped the other gods that our culture worships. We have trusted in ourselves, in politicians, in the words of actors and sports stars, giving them the same importance as God's Word. We ignore what our Lord has commanded us to do out of love for ourselves and for the sake of comfort and personal pleasure. We don't deserve to attend this banquet.

So, Jesus came to earth and gave His life on the cross to make you good enough to be an honored guest at this eternal feast. He has cleansed you from all that would defile you and has made you a pure maiden, His pure maiden, one whom our Lord desires to spend eternity with. And to make sure you don't get lost in this dark and sinful world He gave to you the gift of faith in your baptism. The power of His Spirit shining out into the dark world. With your lamp of faith lit you will be among the wise maidens who will be welcomed into that banquet hall.

Paul gives us another picture of what that day will be like. **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17** ¹⁶ **For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.** ¹⁷ **Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.** We will hear and see our bridegroom coming. All of us who died with the lamp of faith burning, our souls will have gone to be with Jesus. And when He returns on that day you will return with Him. Your bodies will be resurrected just as Jesus' body was. They will be made perfect. Those still alive on earth with the lamp of faith burning will find their earthly bodies transformed into perfect eternal bodies. And Jesus angels will gather all of us to Him even as He transforms the fallen heaven and earth into the new, perfect, eternal heaven and earth. This is the beautiful wedding banquet hall, where we will party with our Lord and Savior, with each other, and with all who have gone before us. All this is Christ's wonderful free gift of grace to all who believe.

What You Need to Do

So then, who are these 5 wise maidens who had the sense to bring extra oil? They are you! You who found it important enough to attend worship today either live in the Sanctuary or watching online. And what does this oil symbolize? The oil symbolizes all the ways that the Holy Spirit works to sustain faith in your life. All the ways He works to keep you in faith. You received that gift of faith in baptism when the Holy Spirit came to take up residence in You and begin a life-long work of keeping your container of oil full, to keep the lamp of faith burning. He does this whenever you participate in Word and Sacrament ministry: whenever you read and study God's Word, confess your sins and hold fast by faith to His words of Absolution, when you remember the wonderful gift of baptism and thank God for it, when you participate in the Lord's Supper and receive His true body and blood. In all these ways the Holy Spirit is at work to keep your faith strong. And He keeps at it even as the world seeks to extinguish your faith, even as the devil tempts you to blow it out. You and I are tempted to worry about a million other things that matter only in this life, while ignoring the building up and strengthening of faith that the Spirit desires to work on in your life and mine. Jesus offers in abundance the means of grace in Word and Sacrament worship, and all of us who are making use of these means of grace this day are the wise maidens who carry with them all the oil they need for eternal life.

But Jesus has a warning for each and every Christian in this parable: some who have received the gift of faith will not be wise. They will foolishly separate themselves from the Means of Grace and ignore the work of the Spirit. And if they keep ignoring Him and put the cares and concerns of this world before the concern about having enough oil, then when He returns on the Last Day they may find themselves wanting. None of us knows when our last day on earth will be, let alone the day of Jesus' return. If either day comes and finds our faith has flagged, the flame gone out, there will be no opportunity to rekindle it. No chance to refill the lamp with oil. No place we can go to buy more. If that is you, then you would be eternally shut out of Jesus' wonderful banquet. Cast out into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Does that worry you? Does that cause a knot in your stomach? Good. Jesus wants it to. It means that the Spirit and His work to keep you in faith is alive and well. It's the Spirit working to keep your relationship with Christ as more important than the world. You are here this morning listening or watching on livestream because the Spirit has impressed this upon you. In your life your faith relationship with Jesus is more important than whatever else you could be doing. Even when you are tempted to let your oil supply run low, and your flame run out, the Spirit is at work to call you back. Jesus is making sure that when that banquet hall door shuts, you are on the inside with Him.

Conclusion

Got milk? Got faith? Got Jesus? Got eternal life? You can run out of milk and still be fine. But Jesus loves you with an eternal love. He wants to make sure you don't run out of faith in Him. He tells this parable as a warning to you and to me to put Him first. To remember the wonderful gift we received in His Gospel Message: the invitation to "The Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom Which Has No End." To rejoice in the gift of faith and the presence of the Holy Spirit we received in our Baptism. To value that faith by continuing to be willing participants in the building up and strengthening of that faith so our lamps burn bright throughout our pilgrimage on this earth. And to be comforted in knowing that the Spirit remains at work to keep our reservoir full, so that we are ready on that day Jesus calls us home to be with Him, and to join Him at that eternal banquet which has no end. Amen.