

Second in a Series of Sermons / 20/20 Vision: Focused on Jesus the Bridegroom

November 8, 2020

Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin | Page 1 of 4

Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. Matthew 25:1-13

Dear friends in Christ,

Last week we began a series of sermons inviting us to focus on Jesus Christ who is the author and the finisher of our faith. It was All Saints Sunday, and we centered our message on Jesus as Lamb. Two lessons we learned last week - #1 that we have every reason to live with **grateful hearts**, in response to Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the guilt of our sin, He takes away the shame and the stain of our sins, He takes away the eternal consequences of our sins. #2 that we have every reason to live with **delightful anticipation** of that day when we will be standing before the throne and before the Lamb, we will be standing right alongside of angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we will be clothed in white robes and we will be holding palm branches in our hands, and we will be shouting with loud voices that salvation belongs to our God!

Until that day we wait. We've already been waiting for 2000 years, and still we're waiting. And maybe you've noticed that most of us aren't very good at waiting. We waited for a long time for election day to come, right? And now we're told we may have to wait even days before we know who is our newly elected president? I was reminded this week that in the year 2000 we waited until December 13, we waited through law suits we we waited through recounts and hanging chads in Florida, and finally we found out that George Bush and not Al Gore would be president. Anybody here who is a fan of waiting, raise your hand. (I didn't think so.)

Last week, our sermon pictured us as saints standing with white robes, saints with palm branches in our hands, saints whose sins had been forgiven and who have made it through the great tribulation. In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus pictures us as a bunch of teenage girls waiting for the party to begin.

You heard that right. In this parable, the Church is pictured as a bridal party composed of ten virgin / teenage girls waiting for the bridegroom to come and consummate his marriage with the lovely bride. The context of this parable is that in Jesus' day, the couples' parents would have arranged the marriage. They would be legally betrothed, as Joseph was to Mary the virgin teenager in the Christmas story. Married in the legal sense, but not yet living together, and so the wedding reception would actually be a celebration of the lovely couple consummating their marriage.

Teenage girls are famous for being patient, right? (A story about standing next to teenage girls in McDonalds waiting to place our order. One girl says to another, "this is like taking forever!" At which point I struck up a conversation with her, even though I didn't know

her. (Not a great idea, I know.) I said, “*you know the good thing about waiting is that it helps to develop the virtue of patience.*” At which time she looked at me as she might have looked at an alien from outer space, she turned away from me and wanted nothing to do with me!)

In today’s sermon, we have two truths we want to learn about the difference between wisdom and foolishness. Two truths about making sure our faith stays strong as we wait for Jesus to come back again.

Truth #1 is the importance of planning ahead, instead of just winging it.

Truth #2 is the importance of staying alert, instead of snoozing.

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

The first thing we learn today about the difference between wise Christians and foolish Christians is the importance of planning ahead in life, instead of just winging it. Since many of us were confirmed as teenagers, that is the picture I invite you to hold in your mind as we study this text. In the Rite of Confirmation, we promised in the presence of all kinds of witnesses and before God that we would never stop believing that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Lord. We promised to be diligent in the use of the means of grace, which is a fancy way of saying that we promised to go to Church, we promised to be reading and studying and meditating on the Word of God, we promised to often receive our Lord’s Supper.

In today’s parable five virgin girls were wise - they took a flask of extra oil for their lamps. They planned ahead. They anticipated that it could be a long wait, and they took a few extra minutes to get themselves ready. When crunch time came, they were prepared. They had extra oil.

The oil represents a faith that is continually sustained by the Word of God. Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Faith in Lutheran circles is defined as a gift of God worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit as we hear, read, mark, and inwardly digest the Word of God. In non Lutheran circles, faith is often described as a decision you reach after hearing that Word and thinking it through in a mature manner.

(Story of two Lutheran School third grade students years ago. I was teaching them that faith in Jesus Christ was a gift and that the most important decision you could make in life would be to go to church and read God’s Word. One of my students was a son of a Lutheran pastor, and the other was the son of very strong Christians and non Lutheran. When I asked

my summarizing question, “Now what is the most important decision you could ever make in life? The non Lutheran boy answered - “to believe in Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior.” I looked over at the son of the Lutheran pastor, he started twitching, he knew something was wrong, and we went on to clarify the Lutheran answer, the answer I was looking for - the “go to church and ready your Bible and receive the Supper answer.)

In today’s parable, five virgin bridesmaids were foolish. For whatever reason they just winged it. They didn’t plan ahead, they took no extra oil, they trusted that things would work out. It’s interesting to me that the Greek word for “foolish” is the English word moron. By definition, a moron is one who lacks good judgment. Dear friends in Christ, understand this - it is in our very nature to be foolish, wisdom has to come on down from on high. It’s easy to be foolish, it requires hard work and discipline to keep our focus on Jesus who is the author and the finisher of our faith. The Good News is that He has already gone on before us, He has already run the perfect race, He has already suffered all that we should suffered, His body had already been broken, His blood has already been shed, He has already been crucified until he was dead and buried, He has already risen up from the dead, He has already ascended up into heaven, He is in fact ruling over all of the nations and all of the politics and all of the electioneering, and all of this in for you and for me.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers who regularly thank God that He planned ahead. They rejoice that Jesus didn’t just wing it. They know the value of asking good questions. Is my Christian faith growing or on the decline? Am I focused on what really matters in life or not so much? Do I care about the same things my Savior cares about, or have I fallen into sort of a “It is what it is” attitude? Am I carefully planning each of my days in a way that my faith will be contagious, or am I just sort of winging life and letting the chips fall where they may?

Truth #2 is the importance of staying alert, instead of snoozing.

Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. But at midnight there was a shout, “Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him. Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.”

I’m reminded of a trip Debi and I took year ago, when one of her aunts passed away. As we got into our car, Debi heard a noise in the engine that she thought was a problem, and my response to her was something like, “I’m sure it’s not a problem. I wouldn’t worry about it.” It wasn’t the first time in my life, nor was it the last, when I adopted the attitude that if I would ignore the problem, it would go away in time.” Debi tells me that there was a noise under the engine of our Buick station wagon, and that I said something like, “I wouldn’t worry about it.” Soon into the trip the check engine light came on, and in my mind - “I’m sure we’ll be fine.” She tells me that at a certain point, either the oil gauge or the water

Second in a Series of Sermons / 20/20 Vision: Focused on Jesus the Bridegroom

November 8, 2020

Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin | Page 4 of 4

gauge went haywire, and I kept driving. The end of the story is that as we approached West Salem, Wisconsin, there was smoke, there was sputtering, and then more sputtering, the engine failed, and before we knew it, we were being towed backwards to Lewiston, Mn, we missed the family funeral, my bride was frustrated, to put it mildly.

Instead of staying alert to problems along the way, I just kept hitting the snooze button. Foolishness ruled the day, and the cost was significant. On the bright side of things, we ended up getting a newer and a better car. Even brighter than that is that my wife forgave me, as is her habit, in response to Christ forgiving her first. Which is the brightest news of all today - that Jesus Christ paid the ultimate price for every one of our failures to stay alert, for every one of our bad habits, and for every bit of foolishness that rises up and rules our days.

To use the language of Amos, Christ paid the price for the all of the evil we have done and the good we have failed to do individually and collectively. Keep in mind that Amos was talking to an entire nation when He pointed out the judgment that would soon be upon them. God was as ticked off as a God can be. He was ticked off about how their solemn assemblies were insincere, their burnt offerings, their peace offerings, and their grain offerings were unacceptable, their songs of worship were just noise, He wanted nothing to do with the melody of their harps, and most of all, God was ticked off with their lack of compassion towards the poor, the hungry, and the oppressed.

Israel wasn't just guilty of ignoring a few warning signals, it wasn't just that they were snoozing along the way and having a few bumps and bruises along the way. Many of them had run out of oil, their lamps were no longer burning, their faith in the one true God was lost.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers full of folks who rejoice every day that God never slumbers, He never sleeps, He watches over entire nations at a time. They know the danger of letting their spiritual tanks go empty, they know the danger of despising the preaching of God's Word, they know the emptiness of trying to live life with Christ at a distance, they know the harm of not practicing what they preach. But even more than all of that, they know what a beautiful Savior they worship. Frequently their faith goes wobbly and they stumble into spiritual apathy and worse, but always their Savior loves them. As often as they are diligent in the means of grace, Jesus holds them close. And as often as they stay focused on Jesus the Bridegroom soon to return, that often they smile as they repeat the slogan, "Happy wife, happy life." Amen.