

Pentecost 22 11/9/14
Matthew 25:1-13 27A

THE BRIDEGROOM CAME, AND THOSE WHO WERE READY WENT IN WITH HIM TO THE MARRIAGE FEAST, AND THE DOOR WAS SHUT.

Whenever we pray “Thy kingdom come,” we learn from our *Small Catechism*, that we are praying:

- A. that God would give us His Holy Spirit so that we believe His Word and lead godly lives as members of His kingdom of grace;
- B. bring many others into His kingdom of grace;
- C. use us to extend His kingdom of grace; and
- D. hasten the coming of His kingdom of glory.

The focus of our worship as the church year comes to an end is that last thing for which we pray -- “hasten the coming of His Kingdom of glory.” Every time that you pray, “Thy kingdom come,” you are praying that Christ would come quickly to deliver us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven.

The theme of our worship on this Sunday is the fulfillment of the petition, “Thy kingdom come,” the Last Day, when Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead. Those who have been brought to faith in Christ and remained faithful to the end will be escorted to the marriage feast of the Lamb. Those who grew lazy and complacent and lost their faith will be turned away and lost forever. In our Gospel, Jesus proclaims this truth for all to hear. Our Lord warns the foolish and comforts the wise.

In the parable, all ten virgins expected the arrival of the bridegroom. All took their lamps in anticipation of his arrival. But, five were foolish. They took their lamps, but they brought no oil for their lamps. They were not prepared to meet the bridegroom when he came.

Jesus is the bridegroom. His Church is His bride. Jesus uses the parable to teach His church -- which is described in the parable as “ten virgins” -- a very important truth. All ten virgins have heard of and knew the Bridegroom, Christ. Every virgin anticipates the arrival of the Bridegroom and expects to live in heaven forever.

Let me make one thing very clear -- the Parable of our Lord concerns itself only with those who call themselves Christians. It has nothing to do with the atheist or the agnostic, nor does it have anything to do with those who follow false religions. The parable deals only with Christians. The parable not talking to those people out there, or the evil world around us. Our Lord’s words in our Gospel are talking to you, sitting in the church pew this morning.

By way of application, the ten virgins represent the congregation of Concordia. Each of us has been baptized into Christ. Everyone of us prays, “Thy kingdom comes,” in the heartfelt desire that Christ would hasten His return. But, as you await the coming of your Bridegroom, what are you doing?

In the parable, five of the virgins were wise and half were foolish. What made the difference? All knew the bridegroom was coming. All brought their lamps. The wise brought oil for the lamps. But, the foolish had no oil for their lamps.

What is this oil? This oil is the Holy Spirit, the 3rd person of the Holy Trinity. Just as lamps need oil, we poor sinners need the Holy Spirit. We are by nature blind, dead, and enemies of God and we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him.

The Holy Spirit sanctifies us. That is, the Spirit makes us holy by bringing us to faith in Christ and keeping us in that faith so that we trust,

rejoice, and find comfort in Christ Jesus alone. And, the Holy Spirit uses the means of grace -- the Word and the Sacraments -- to bring us to faith in Christ and keep us in Christ.

The wise are those saints who have been brought to faith in Christ and having saving knowledge of the Savior. They know the bridegroom is coming.

The wise are those who daily return to the waters of their baptism to drown their flesh, claim the gifts God gave them in the blessed washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, and daily arise to new life in Christ.

The wise confess their sins. And, they hear, believe, and rejoice in the words of the absolution, "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven!"

The wise are daily in the Word of God, remembering that it is through His Word that God does His work in us.

The wise are those who, feeling their human flesh and blood and remembering that they shall return to the dust from which they came, hunger and thirst for Christ's righteousness. And so, they come to the Lord's table to eat and drink our Lord's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and strength to live as the new creations they are in Christ.

The foolish are those who have been baptized and taught the six chief parts of Christian doctrine. But, they grow weary and tired in awaiting the bridegroom's return. As the bridegroom delays his coming, they begin to love the things of this world more than they love Jesus. Like the virgins in the parable, who had their lamps and knew the bridegroom was coming, but brought no oil -- the foolish are those who begin to reject the work of the Spirit and cut themselves off from His means of grace, the means God has chosen to keep alive the faith He began at our baptism.

They are they who think, “I was baptized. So I’ve got it made.” “If I miss church this week, no big deal.” Instead of hungering and thirsting for Christ’s righteousness, they see Holy Communion as something tacked on at the end of the service to make church 10 minutes longer. They are too busy to be in the Word of God each day.

Separated from means of grace, their faith begins to weaken, grow weary. Sin doesn’t seem like such a big deal anymore, after all, everyone else does it. They begin to believe that God will open the door of heaven to them because of their good works or their name on a membership list.

[PAUSE]

I can’t look into you hearts, but right now, I could take a good guess at what you are thinking, “I’m glad he’s not talking about me. I hope this guy in front of me, and behind me, and beside me, is listening, because he really needs to hear this.”

Oh, it can’t happen to you. You can’t lose your faith in Christ? I say to you the words of Paul, “Wake up, O sleeper (Eph 5:14).” Like Solomon who loved the things of this world more than his Lord, like Judas who betrayed his Lord, you can lose your faith. If you cut yourself off from the means of grace, you are endangering your faith in Christ.

“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” How do we keep watch? The Christian life is the life of repentance. Daily, we return to the waters of our baptism to drown our sinful flesh, so that we may rise from the death of sin to live as the new creations we are in Christ. Daily, we are in the Word, growing in grace and teaching it to our children. We come to Lord’s Supper for the forgiveness of sins and strength to live as the new creations God has made us in our baptism. We keep watch by being faithful in our use of the means of grace.

“Thy kingdom come.” We pray that God would give us oil for our lamps -- the Holy Spirit -- so that we believe His Word and lead a godly life. And, we pray that God would send His Holy Spirit to bring others into His kingdom of grace and use us to extend that kingdom. We share the hope we have in Jesus. We invite others to worship with us. Members of the congregation selflessly volunteer to serve on the church council, so that the work of Christ’s church may continue and increase. Our LWML members serve the members of our congregation and our community, being Christ to their neighbor and supporting mission work throughout the world. Other members lovingly volunteer to teach our children Sunday School. Through our outreach, we pray that all people will be ready to meet the Bridegroom at His coming.

And always, we pray that Christ would hasten the coming of His kingdom of glory.