

"THE TIME HAS COME"
MATTHEW 25:1-13
TWENTY-FOURTH S. A. PENTECOST
MESSIAH, BOERNE
NOVEMBER 12, 2023

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
AMEN.

READ TEXT: MATTHEW 25:1-13

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

MANY AMERICANS SEEM TO BE IN LOVE WITH WEDDINGS, OR PERHAPS THEY ARE JUST INFATUATED WITH WEDDINGS AND IN LOVE WITH THEMSELVES. JUST THINK ABOUT IT: MANY PEOPLE SPEND EXORBITANT AMOUNTS OF TIME AND MONEY ON PREPARING FOR THE WEDDING CEREMONY AND ITS ACCOMPANYING FESTIVITIES, AND IT SEEMS LIKE THE MORE THE GLITZ AND GLAMOR, THE MORE AMERICANS ARE FASCINATED BY IT. MEANWHILE, MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES SUFFER DUE TO CARELESS PREPARATION, AND LIFE TOGETHER AS HUSBAND AND WIFE IN HOLY MATRIMONY TOO OFTEN SEEMS LIKE AN INCONVENIENT AFTERTHOUGHT. FOR EXAMPLE, THE HIGHLY PUBLICIZED WEDDING OF KIM KARDASIAN AND KRIS HUMPHRIES IN 2011 COST AN ESTIMATED \$10 MILLION DOLLARS, WHILE THE MARRIAGE LASTED ONLY 72 DAYS. (FOR ALL YOU MATH GEEKS, THAT'S \$138,888.88 PER DAY.) WE WILL NEVER KNOW ALL THE REASONS WHY THEIR MARRIAGE FAILED, BUT LACK OF ADEQUATE PREPARATION CERTAINLY WOULD BE HIGH ON THE LIST.

TODAY IS THE THIRD-TO-THE-LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR, AND OUR FOCUS TODAY IS ON THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY TO PREPARE FOR

OUR LORD'S SUDDEN RETURN AT THE END OF TIME. WE CAN'T SAY *UNEXPECTED* RETURN BECAUSE CHRIST TELLS US OVER AND OVER AGAIN IN THE SCRIPTURES THAT HE *WILL* RETURN. FOR EXAMPLE, IN OUR TEXT FOR TODAY FROM THE GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW, THE CHURCH IS PICTURED AS TEN VIRGIN WEDDING ATTENDANTS WAITING FOR THE ARRIVAL OF THE BRIDEGROOM TO TAKE HIS BRIDE IN PROCESSION TO THE WEDDING BANQUET HALL. LIKE THE CHURCH OF ALL AGES, SOME OF HER MEMBERS ARE CHARACTERIZED AS WISE BECAUSE THEY ARE *PREPARED* FOR CHRIST'S SUDDEN RETURN, WHILE OTHER MEMBERS ARE CHARACTERIZED AS FOOLISH BECAUSE THEY ARE *UNPREPARED* FOR OUR SAVIOR'S IMMINENT ARRIVAL. THE WISE MEMBERS ARE PREPARED BECAUSE THEY HAVE AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF OIL FOR THEIR LAMPS, WHILE THE FOOLISH ARE UNPREPARED BY NOT HAVING ENOUGH OIL. AS THE CHURCH TODAY, WE NEED TO BE WISE AND NOT DELAY IN PREPARING FOR OUR LORD'S IMMINENT RETURN, FOR *THE TIME HAS COME*.

GOD ANNOUNCES TO ALL PEOPLE THROUGH THE CHURCH THAT THEY MUST PREPARE FOR CHRIST'S SUDDEN RETURN. BEFORE HIS ASCENSION, JESUS ASSURED HIS DISCIPLES HE WOULD RETURN. FOR EXAMPLE, ON MAUNDY THURSDAY EVENING, JESUS TOLD THE APOSTLES:

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE ARE MANY ROOMS. IF IT WERE NOT SO, WOULD I HAVE TOLD YOU THAT I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU? AND IF I GO AND PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU, I WILL COME BACK AND WILL TAKE YOU TO MYSELF, THAT WHERE I AM YOU MAY BE ALSO. (JOHN 14:2-3)

FURTHERMORE, AFTER HIS ASCENSION, TWO ANGELS APPEARED TO THE DISCIPLES AND SAID: "MEN OF GALILEE, WHY DO YOU STAND LOOKING

INTO HEAVEN? THIS JESUS, WHO WAS TAKEN UP FROM YOU INTO HEAVEN, WILL COME IN THE SAME WAY AS YOU SAW HIM GO INTO HEAVEN" (ACTS 1:11). SINCE JESUS PROMISED HE WOULD RETURN, AND SINCE JESUS NEVER LIES, WE MUST PREPARE FOR HIS RETURN, AS ST. PAUL PROCLAIMED TO THE ATHENEANS:

THE TIMES OF IGNORANCE GOD OVERLOOKED, BUT NOW HE COMMANDS ALL PEOPLE EVERYWHERE TO REPENT, BECAUSE HE HAS FIXED A DAY ON WHICH HE WILL JUDGE THE WORLD IN RIGHTEOUSNESS BY A MAN WHOM HE HAS APPOINTED; AND OF THIS HE HAS GIVEN ASSURANCE TO ALL BY RAISING HIM FROM THE DEAD. (ACTS 17:30-31)

THUS, GOD WARNS US IN HIS WORD THAT JESUS CHRIST WILL RETURN, AND SO WE MUST PREPARE FOR HIS COMING BY REPENTING OF OUR SINS, ESPECIALLY WITH REGARD TO OUR SIN OF APATHY IN PREPARING FOR HIS IMMINENT RETURN, AND BY BELIEVING IN JESUS CHRIST AS OUR LORD AND SAVIOR.

JESUS COMMUNICATES THE SAME MESSAGE ABOUT OUR NEED TO PREPARE FOR HIS IMMINENT RETURN IN OUR TEXT FOR TODAY. THE PARABLE DESCRIBES A TYPICAL JEWISH WEDDING OF JESUS' DAY. THE CEREMONY INVOLVED TWO PARTS: THE FIRST PART WAS THE BETROTHAL, A FORMAL CONTRACT BETWEEN TWO FAMILIES IN WHICH A MAN AND A WOMAN WERE ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED AT A LATER DATE, PERHAPS IN A YEAR. THE SECOND PART, WHICH IS DESCRIBED IN OUR TEXT, INVOLVED THE GROOM GOING TO THE BRIDE'S HOUSE AND BRINGING HER INTO HIS HOUSE PREPARED FOR THE BRIDE IN ORDER TO CONSUMATE THE MARRIAGE. A WEDDING BANQUET GENERALLY ACCOMPANIED THIS SECOND PART OF THE CEREMONY, AND THE TEN VIRGINS IN OUR TEXT ARE THE BRIDE'S

ATTENDANTS WAITING SOMEWHERE NEAR HER HOUSE TO ACCOMPANY HER IN THE PROCESSION TO THE GROOM'S HOUSE. ALL THE ATTENDANTS HAVE BROUGHT LAMPS WITH THEM FOR THE EVENING PROCESSION, BUT SOME ARE WISE BECAUSE THEY HAVE BROUGHT *EXTRA* OIL FOR THEIR LAMPS, WHILE THE OTHERS ARE FOOLISH BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO EXTRA OIL WITH THEM.

THE OIL FOR THE VIRGINS' LAMPS SYMBOLIZES THE GRACE OF GOD, BY WHICH THE BELIEVER RECEIVES THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST, WHICH IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY IN ORDER TO ENTER HEAVEN ON JUDGMENT DAY. THE CHURCH IS THE MEANS BY WHICH GOD PREPARES HER MEMBERS FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN BY GRANTING THEM GRACE THROUGH HIS WORD AND SACRAMENTS. THE TEN VIRGIN ATTENDANTS SYMBOLIZE THE COMPLETE MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHURCH THROUGHOUT ALL AGES, FOR THERE WILL ALWAYS BE SOME MEMBERS WHO ARE WISE AND SOME WHO ARE FOOLISH. THE WISE ARE THOSE WHO HEAR GOD'S WORD REGULARLY, OBEY CHRIST'S COMMAND TO BE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, AND RECEIVE CHRIST'S TRUE BODY AND BLOOD FREQUENTLY IN HOLY COMMUNION. THE FOOLISH ARE THOSE WHO DESPISE PREACHING AND GOD'S WORD AND NEGLECT HIS MEANS OF GRACE. THIS IS THE *CENTRAL POINT* GOD WANTS US TO UNDERSTAND, SO DON'T BE FOOLISH BUT *WISE* MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH BY RECEIVING GOD'S GRACE, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, FOR THE TIME HAS COME.

IN VERSE THIRTEEN, JESUS TELLS US TO "WATCH . . . FOR YOU KNOW NOT THE DAY NOR THE HOUR." JESUS WANTS US TO HAVE OUR EYES OF FAITH WIDE OPEN SO THAT WE ARE ALWAYS READY TO RECEIVE HIM AND TO ENTER WITH HIM INTO GOD'S HEAVENLY KINGDOM. NOTICE IN THE PARABLE, HOWEVER, THAT, "AS THE BRIDEGROOM WAS DELAYED, THEY ALL"—BOTH THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH VIRGINS—"BECAME DROWSY AND SLEPT" (V 5). IN THE PARABLE, JESUS CHRIST IS SYMBOLIZED BY THE BRIDEGROOM, AND TO MANY PEOPLE, HIS RETURN MAY SEEM TO BE DELAYED. BUT REMEMBER WHAT ST. PETER WRITES:

THE LORD IS NOT SLOW TO FULFILL HIS PROMISE [TO RETURN] AS SOME COUNT SLOWNESS, BUT IS PATIENT TOWARD YOU, NOT WISHING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH, BUT THAT ALL SHOULD REACH REPENTANCE. (3:9)

THE WISE VIRGINS IN THE PARABLE ARE ABLE TO SLEEP BECAUSE THEY ARE SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THEY ARE READY FOR THE BRIDEGROOM'S ARRIVAL, EVEN IF HE DELAYS IN COMING. THEY HAVE EXTRA OIL WITH THEM, THE GRACE OF GOD RECEIVED IN HOLY BAPTISM. THE FOOLISH VIRGINS SLEEP IN THEIR IGNORANCE, UNAWARE OF THEIR IMPENDING NEED FOR OIL, THE GRACE OF GOD.

SUDDENLY THE CRY GOES OUT, "HERE IS THE BRIDEGROOM! COME OUT TO MEET HIM" (V 6). OUR TEXT SAYS, "ALL THE VIRGINS" GOT UP TO MEET HIM (V 7), BUT ONLY THE WISE ARE READY. THEY HAVE EXTRA OIL TO FILL THEIR TRIMMED LAMPS, BUT THE FOOLISH VIRGINS ARE CAUGHT EMPTY HANDED (VV 8-9). WHEN THEY FOOLISHLY GO TO TRY TO PURCHASE OIL FOR THEMSELVES, THE BRIDEGROOM ARRIVES, ENTERS THE

WEDDING HALL WITH THE WISE ATTENDANTS, AND SHUTS THE DOOR (V 10). AS ON JUDGMENT DAY, IT WILL BE TOO LATE TO GET READY WHEN CHRIST RETURNS, AND TO ALL THOSE WHO ARE FOOLISH AND UNPREPARED, CHRIST WILL SAY, "TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, I DO NOT KNOW YOU" (V 11). SO, THE CHURCH CRIES OUT TO WISE AND FOOLISH ALIKE, "WATCH, BE READY, FOR THE TIME HAS COME."

THE QUESTION REMAINS, HOWEVER, HOW SHALL WE WAIT FOR CHRIST'S RETURN AS THOSE WHO ARE WISE, OR AS ST. PETER ASKS,

SINCE [THE EARTH AND THE HEAVENLY BODIES] ARE . . . TO BE [BURNED UP AND] DISOLVED, WHAT SORT OF PEOPLE OUGHT YOU TO BE IN LIVES OF HOLINESS AND GODLINESS, WAITING FOR AND HASTENING THE COMING OF THE DAY OF GOD. . . . (2 PET 3:11-12)

FIRST OF ALL, AS OUR SAINTED FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD, DR. A. L. BARRY SAID, WE MUST *BE IN THE WORD*. THE WORD OF GOD WRITTEN IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS OF THE HOLY BIBLE *IS* THE SOLE RULE AND NORM OF FAITH AND PRACTICE FOR THE CHRISTIAN. WHILE THE WRITINGS AND OPINIONS OF OTHER PEOPLE MAY PROVIDE US WITH GOOD AND HELPFUL INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE, THE WORD OF GOD *ALONE* "IS A LAMP TO MY FEET AND A LIGHT TO MY PATH" (PS 119:105). AS SCRIPTURE SAYS, "THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE; AND FOOLS DESPISE WISDOM AND INSTRUCTION" (PROV 1:7). SO, IF WE WANT TO BE WISE, PREPARED, AND READY FOR CHRIST'S RETURN, WE NEED TO *BE IN THE WORD*.

SECONDLY, WE NEED TO *BE IN WORSHIP AND CORPORATE BIBLE STUDY REGULARLY*. THIS IS NOTHING NEW, FOR AS ST. LUKE WRITES IN THE BOOK OF ACTS CONCERNING THE EARLY CHRISTIANS IN JERUSALEM: "THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES' TEACHING AND THE FELLOWSHIP, TO THE BREAKING OF BREAD AND THE PRAYERS" (2:42). WHEN WE'RE IN WORSHIP, GOD GRACIOUSLY FORGIVES US OUR SINS AS WE BELIEVE HIS WORD AND RECEIVE HIS HOLY SACRAMENTS. IN HOLY BAPTISM, ALL OUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN, COVERED, WASHED AWAY, REMOVED AS FAR AS THE EAST IS FROM THE WEST, DROWNED IN THE DEPTHS OF THE SEA. WHEN WE RECEIVE OUR LORD'S BODY AND BLOOD IN HOLY COMMUNION, WE RECEIVE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, STRENGTHENING OF OUR FAITH, AND THE ASSURANCE OF LIFE EVERLASTING. AND WHEN WE STUDY GOD'S WORD WITH OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS, WE LEARN FROM GOD AND EACH OTHER FOR OUR GROWTH IN KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM, AS THE BOOK OF PROVERBS SAYS, "IRON SHARPENS IRON, AND ONE MAN SHARPENS ANOTHER" (27:16). SO, AS THOSE WHO ARE WISE BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, LET'S NOT NEGLECT "TO MEET TOGETHER, AS IS THE HABIT OF SOME, BUT" ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER TO COME REGULARLY TO WORSHIP AND BIBLE STUDY CLASSES, "AND ALL THE MORE AS YOU SEE THE DAY DRAWING NEAR" (HEB 10:25).

DEAR FRIENDS, CHRIST HAS COME. HE LIVED A SINLESS LIFE ON EARTH FOR YOU, SUFFERED AND DIED IN YOUR PLACE AS THE PUNISHMENT FOR YOUR SINS TO REDEEM YOU, ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN TO PREPARE A RESTING PLACE FOR YOU, AND HE WILL COME AGAIN. TODAY HE COMES

INTO THE WORLD BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, THROUGH THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH,
THROUGH MESSIAH LUTHERAN CONGREGATION, THROUGH HIS HOLY WORD AND
SACRAMENTS. BUT ONE DAY SOON HE WILL RETURN IN GLORY TO JUDGE
THE WHOLE WORLD IN RIGHTEOUSNESS. SO, LET'S NOT BE APATHETIC
BUT *PREPARED* FOR OUR LORD'S RETURN. LET'S *BE WISE* BY HEARING
AND DOING GOD'S WORD, FOR THE TIME HAS COME. AMEN.