

Rev. Danny Mackey  
Last Sunday in the Church Year  
November 25, 2018  
Matthew 25:1-13  
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

*“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.”*

The parable of the wise and foolish virgins only deals with those who call themselves Christian. It has nothing to do with the atheist or the agnostic, has no value for the unbeliever of any stripe. It deals with Christians—with people who know Jesus and fully expect to be with Him in the new heavens and the new earth one day. It deals... with you.

Jesus describes His Church as ten virgins. All ten virgins have heard of and know the Bridegroom. Every virgin anticipates the Bridegroom’s arrival. Each virgin fully expects to be ushered into the unending marriage feast. The whole group, each virgin with lamp in hand, went to meet the Bridegroom.

This is our congregation here at Grace in Muncie. Each of you has heard of the Lord God and has been brought to faith in Christ through the Gospel. Every one of you anticipates the arrival of Jesus. Each member of this congregation fully expects to be ushered into the unending marriage feast of the Lamb of God in His Kingdom. The complete assembly, each with the Gospel promise in hand, steps forward to meet Jesus, the Bridegroom.

But take a closer look at the ten virgins. Half are wise; half are fools. The foolish virgins have no oil with them. They’ve got their lamps in hand but no oil. No wonder they’re called foolish! The wise virgins not only have their lamps but also flasks of the oil to keep their lamps bright. With lamp and oil, they’ll be able to behold the Bridegroom when He comes.

Take a closer look at those Christians at Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church. Some members are fools; others are wise. The foolish members have no oil with them. They’ve got their membership in hand but neglect the oil. Does that sound foolish to you? The wise followers of Christ not only have the promise in hand, but also faith which relies on the means of grace—yes, faith which uses God’s Word as He has instituted: Baptism, Absolution, the Lord’s Supper. These wise abide in the love of the Father who gave His only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life.

Each of the ten virgins has a lamp. Every member of Grace has been granted faith. The

foolish have no oil; the wise have made certain that they have oil for the necessary light. The foolish neglect the means Christ's given to keep faith alive while those who are wise, thinking on Jesus, make certain that they never do without those very means of grace.

Then the Bridegroom was delayed. As the Bridegroom is delayed, time in this world goes on into the night. The Bridegroom could return at any moment, but no one knows when. The five foolish wait with lamps and no oil; the five wise are able to wait, even slumbering, having both lamps and sufficient oil.

What is the oil? The oil in the lamp is God's grace, which the Lord provides for His Church as she awaits her Bridegroom's Second Advent. The oil is the means of grace: the Word of forgiveness announced in Absolution and applied to the soul, the Baptismal grace that daily rejoices in "the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit which He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior that we might be justified by His grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life" (Ti 3:5-7). The foolish say, "Hey, I was baptized in church." The wise maintain, "I am baptized into Christ."

The oil is the means of grace distributed in the feast of victory of our God. He nourishes our souls through His body and blood in the Holy Communion. This is the blessed oil that keeps the lamps burning brightly as the faithful wait for the Bridegroom's advent. Then, the eternal feast.

This congregation's foolish members think that this Table of the Lord is nice but not necessary. They cut themselves off from this on-going feast for a while. They don't hunger for the Body of Christ and their souls wait for the Lord God Almighty like fools carrying around an empty lamp and walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Two or three weeks become two or three years and extend into two or three decades.

Wise Christians long for the Divine Service on Sundays where the Divine serves the oil of gladness in Word and Sacrament. The wise one hungers for the Meal and is thankful that it's served. The wise one prepares for the entrance into this sanctuary by recalling that the Old Adam needs to be drowned daily by the Word of Baptism so that, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, he or she may be able to enter the holy place where Christ announces His forgiveness for all sins of thought, word, and deed. Here is the oil of gladness, dear people. Here a Christian may plead, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" and hear the Good News of Christ's sin-atonement death, triumphant resurrection and all that

He has done for us and for our salvation. Such a wise one returns to his or her home justified and can fall asleep at night knowing that if the Lord returns at midnight, he or she is ready. Here is the oil of gladness that sustains the soul in a land of darkness and keeps it prepared for the moment of eternity.

What about those who have lamps without oil? What about those who think that God will open the door to them only because of their church membership or claims of good works or legalistic foundations or best of intentions of their stone-cold hearts. What foolishness to fully expect to enter eternal life! With a devilishly placed veil over their eyes, they recline at night with self-deceptive thoughts. They sleep the horrid slumber of those whose lamps are dry and dark.

Then, when all were sleeping *at midnight there was a cry, "Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him."* At the Word of the Bridegroom's impending advent, all are awakened, and all arise. Each one readies her lamp and every wise virgin has the oil needed to trim her lamp. They have souls fed, nurtured, and sustained with the means of grace. What a time of great joy and hope and anticipation! What each one had lived for and prepared for is at the door of eternity. They hear the invitation in the form of proclamation, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your Master" (Mt 25:23). The wise virgins will be escorted from the on-going Feast of the Church in time to the Eternal Feast of the Bridegroom that lasts forever in His Kingdom.

At the Word of the Bridegroom's impending advent, all are awakened, and all arise. Each one readies her lamp and the foolish virgins discover what they always knew. They have been negligent. Their lamps are not ready, and these virgins lack the necessary oil; their souls are empty, and they stand at eternity's entrance without the means of grace.

*And the foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out."*

But the day of salvation has passed; the time of God's gracious invitation has ended. They tried to get everything in order, but in their frantic activity they discover that they lack the one thing needful. Too late they realize what they lack, and they begin begging the wise for their oil. But the foolish may not have the Gospel promise that has been applied to the faithful heart of the wise.

Nor, on that day, will the wise be able to evangelize the lost. It's over and the only thing the wise might say is this: *"Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to*

*the dealers and buy for yourselves.*” So, the foolish virgins go out to buy oil. But Jesus doesn’t say<sup>3</sup> that they were able to find oil. They went out to look and to buy, but it’s too late. In a frantic dash they come back to the entrance to the wedding hall and discover that *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.*

These foolish virgins came, *saying, “Lord, lord, open to us.”* Will these who have despised preaching and God’s Word, despised the means of grace, suddenly want to be with the victorious, ascended, reigning Son of God who has the Eternal Feast? They still think they do, but they’re wrong. If the Ancient of Days opened the door to Paradise and stood before them, they’d cower and be consumed for they would meet Him, not according to His grace and mercy, but in full view of His perfect wrath and holy righteousness.

What will the Lord God Almighty standing on one side of the door say to those foolish, unprepared individuals on the other side? The Bridegroom *answered, “Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.”* Thus did Jesus end this parable and thus did He then speak to those standing before Him, *“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”*

But someone may ask, “The Bridegroom was delayed. Why?” The question really should be asked, “Why does the Bridegroom delay?” We are given at least three reasons:

First, because He desired all people to be saved and is giving His Church time to get the Word of God straight and to get the Word of Life out in order that more people would receive God’s favor through His power-filled means of grace.

Second, you may have been foolish and, in His undeserved mercy and grace, the Lord God is delaying the Day of His Second Advent in order for you to receive the gift of repentance and to hear the Word of forgiveness.

And third, so that you may dine upon the on-going feast of His Divine Service here today, so that you may remain ready for your place at the eternal feast that the Father has prepared for you by virtue of His beloved Son’s Incarnation by the Holy Spirit, perfect life, sin-atoning death, victorious resurrection, and triumphant ascension.

In Jesus’ name.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in + Christ Jesus.