

The Last Sunday after Trinity Sunday  
St. Matthew 25:1-13  
November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018  
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
St. Michael and All Angels Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Augusta, GA  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

## Ten Virgins

*In Nomine Iesu!*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

### **Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:**

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Once again, we have come to the end of the Church's year. And like every year we end our year with an exhortation to be watchful and be prepared. To this end, the Lord + Jesus tells us a parable about ten virgins. The ten virgins represent the entire Church on Earth. The whole of those who profess to be Christians. The number ten represents full completion—complete completion. There can be nothing added to its fullness. Therefore, the ten virgins represents the full, complete number of those in the Church; all those who claim the name of Christian.

However, we are told by our Lord + Jesus in the parable that there were five wise and five foolish virgins. In other words, there are within the Church on Earth those who only profess the name of Christian publicly, but inwardly—in their lamps—they are empty and foolish. They lack saving faith. They do not truly love the Lord + Jesus. They instead love themselves and the praise of man. This should serve as a stark warning to all of us who are in the Church. Take heed that you are not a Christian because of family ties, or only because your friends are Christians, or because you want to be seen as a “good person.”

This is part of what it means to be watchful. We watch out that we are not like the foolish virgins who seek the praise of man; who only are a part of the Church to make themselves look like a “good person.” This is why we need to daily and regularly examine ourselves. We need to examine what is in our hearts. This daily examination should only produce one result: that we are full of sin and in desperate need of grace and mercy from the Lord God. We should daily be going to the throne of grace of our Lord + Jesus Christ. We should daily be going to the mercyseat of our Lord + Jesus to lay our sins before Him, and receive forgiveness from Him on account of His obedience to the Law of God and on account of His sacrifice for us on the tree of the holy cross.

The Jews sprinkled blood on the mercyseat to appease the wrath of God for the sins of the whole nation of Israel. But, our Lord + Jesus has poured His precious blood onto the eternal throne of grace of our Lord God heavenly Father for the atonement of the whole world. Wise virgins cling to the promises found in the atonement of our Lord + Jesus. Foolish virgins only give the atonement lip service, while they puff themselves up over how good of a person they think they are. Foolish virgins

to not examine themselves on a daily, regular basis. For, if they truly and honestly did they would see nothing in themselves worthy of saving. They would see only that they truly were foolish virgins who have no oil in their lamps.

Wise virgins fill their lamps with the works and merits of Christ. When they examine themselves, they hate what they see. They see only their sin and corruption. They stop looking inside of themselves for their salvation, but look outside themselves to the Lord + Jesus. They turn to His throne of grace—to the cross—and cling to and trust in His works on their behalf and His sacrifice for them. This is what it means to be watchful. We keep watching over our souls by looking at our sins and forsaking our works and trusting in the Lord's works for us.

We keep watchful, for the enemy is always about. The enemy of our faith in Christ lurks about to take that faith from us. The enemy desires that we think good about ourselves and what we do. The enemy wants us looking away from the Lord + Jesus and His sacrifice for us, so that we must depend on being saved through our own works. The enemy presents himself in our own sinful flesh, in our society and world, and even the devil comes as a wolf in sheep's clothing—disguising himself—to lead us out of salvation, so that we may be found with empty lamps. Therefore, keep watch over your souls by constantly reminding yourself that your salvation is found in the Lord + Jesus and not in what you do, or who you are.

Our Lord + Jesus in His parable today also exhorts us to be prepared. The ten virgins all fell asleep while waiting for the bridegroom to come. In Jewish culture at the time of our Lord's dwelling on Earth, the bride and her bridesmaids would wait for the bridegroom and the groomsmen to come and escort the bride to the wedding hall. This is what the virgins in today's Gospel reading are doing. They are waiting for the bridegroom and his attendants to come and take them to the wedding hall. But the bridegroom is delayed. He is delayed so much that the ten virgins all fall asleep. Finally, at midnight, the hour when nobody expects anybody to come for everyone is normally asleep at that hour, the bridegroom comes.

This is why the Lord exhorts us to be prepared. For, we do not know the hour when He will come and take us to the wedding hall of Heaven. The five wise virgins were prepared. They kept their lamps trimmed with oil. Their faith and trust were in what the Lord + Jesus had done for them and not what they did themselves. The foolish virgins awoke at the call of the bridegroom to find they were out of oil. They realized at this point how foolishly they lived their lives here on Earth. They had wasted the opportunity to make sure they had what was necessary to meet the bridegroom.

But even at this point they still do not understand what salvation truly means, for in their earthly lives they trusted in themselves and sought the praise of man through their good works. And now, when the Bridegroom calls at midnight, they still try to find some good work to put forth for their salvation. They even ask the wise virgins for some of their oil—some of what makes them a Christian. But this is not the way things work. Our salvation is not dependent on our works, nor is it dependent on the works of other Christians. In other words, just calling yourself a Christian does not mean that you are one. It requires faith in the Lord. It requires clinging to Him and His works and merits.

The wise virgins even try to explain this to the foolish virgins. We cannot give you our oil because there is not enough for both you and us. You have to be judged by your own deeds. Or rather, the deeds of the One Who is truly worthy—the Lord + Jesus Christ. St. Augustine in his commentary on these words makes the point that the wise virgins are not giving advice when they tell the foolish virgins to go and buy oil, but are really mocking them. The wise virgins are not saying, "If you do this, then maybe you will be alright," but are really saying, "You had your chance before and you squandered it. Now live with your fate." It was midnight. There were not going to be any shops open for them to buy oil.

On the Last Day, when the Bridegroom calls us from the sleep chambers of our graves, it will be too late to buy oil from the merchants. This is why we must always be prepared. We must go to the merchants while we are alive; we must come to this house of God and receive from the minister the gifts that the Lord God has given him to keep us in the one, true faith. The gifts through which the Holy Ghost works to create and sustain faith in us.

While we have breath—before we fall asleep in the Lord—we must prepare ourselves with Holy Baptism and Holy Absolution, confessing our sins and receiving forgiveness from the pastor as if from God Himself.

We must prepare ourselves by attending and hearing preaching from this pulpit, so that we might fill our ears with the good things that our Lord + Jesus has done for us, and so that we might learn to forsake ourselves and our works and cling to the works and merits of our Lord + Jesus Christ alone.

We must prepare ourselves by filling our lamps with the Body and Blood of our Lord + Jesus in bread and wine. We receive forgiveness, life and salvation from this altar from the pastor—the merchant tasked with giving these things to you. He prepares us to meet the Bridegroom—our Lord and Savior—by giving us oil for our lamps.

We must also prepare ourselves by gathering together, like we are doing this day, with other Christians, who help us watch and help us prepare by reminding us that salvation is found only in our faith grounded in the Lord + Jesus Christ, and not in our good works.

Let us therefore keep watch and prepare our hearts as we end another Church year and begin a new one. Let us turn to the Lord + Jesus and cling in faith to all that He has done for us. For He has called us out of darkness and sin into His eternal wedding hall of Heaven. Let us go and meet the Bridegroom in faith, clinging to Him for our salvation, and clinging to His Throne of Grace, where His shed blood pleads on our behalf to the heavenly Father, declaring us to be His holy Bride—His Church—who goes to meet Him at His call and enters into the heavenly wedding hall to celebrate the marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom for all eternity. May the Lord grant this unto us all. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:**

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

**The Votum:**

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*