Be Watchful, with Faith Burning Bright
Pentecost 24 (Propers 27) — St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Bremen, IN
8 November 2026 — Rev. Micah Wildauer

Elements of this sermon were borrowed from another sermon which I preached in November 2023 in Orange Walk, Belize

Amos 5:18-24
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13 *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*
25 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and
went to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3 For
when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the wise took flasks
of oil with their lamps. 5 As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and
slept. 6 But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet
him.' 7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said to the
wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the wise answered,
saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and
buy for yourselves.' 10 And 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. 11 Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' 12 But
he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 Watch therefore, for you know
neither the day nor the hour.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus "ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead." This conclusion to the Apostles' Creed contains the only present tense and future tense actions of our Lord. We celebrated the ascension of Jesus to the heavenly throne back in May. To sit on the throne is no idle action. To sit on the throne means that He is actively ruling over all creation as the Victor over life and death because He rose from the dead. His kingdom truly is not of this world. That means that the Christian can find comfort in knowing that Jesus remains on the throne and is actively engaged in his life, even during national elections.

This Sunday and the following, you will hear texts that prepare your heart for that final future action of Christ Jesus. He will come to judge the living and the dead. The Apostles understood these words in two ways. Firstly, they understood the literal definition. There are people who have died during the centuries and are buried in the ground. There will also be people living when He comes again. Jesus will come to judge both. Secondly, the Apostles understood these words in a spiritual way. There are

people who do not have saving faith and are therefore spiritually dead on the inside. Jesus will judge them for their lack of faith and confession. There are also people who believe in Jesus for their salvation. They are counted among the spiritually living who openly confess “Jesus is Lord” and will be saved.

It is with this frame of mind that Jesus teaches us the parable of the Ten Virgins, and not only of the ten, but of the great Wedding Feast which is to come, another ongoing theme which you have heard of over the past month. Everything is prepared. The food is ready. The decorations are ready. The invited have arrived. The attendants are ready to welcome the bridegroom and his entourage. But the bridegroom is late. He did not come when they all thought that he would come. We don’t know why he was late. We only know that he was late according to the time of the people at the feast.

But was the Bridegroom truly late? Since the Bridegroom represents Jesus, and Jesus is the Son of God, then God is never late because He does not live by our time. He comes according to His time. This is the first part of the parable that we learn. The Last Day will happen according to God’s time. His time is not our time. This is why Jesus says to us: “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

In another part of Scripture, Jesus teaches us that many will come and say to us, “Look over here!” or “Look over there! Jesus has already come back!” Many people will also try and predict the Last Day. No one can predict the Last Day. And Jesus will not come back to one specific location on the earth. Today’s reading from 1 Thessalonians teaches us that the Last Day will be seen by everyone everywhere. There will not be a secret rapture. It will be like a ray of lightning that lights up the sky and everyone can see it from every direction. Tons of angels and a loud trumpet. You will not miss it.

This is why the Gospel reading teaches us that there will be a voice that calls out, “Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.” At that time, some people will be ready and others will not be ready. Therefore, how do you know if you are ready for the Last Day? How do you prepare for that moment when the watchman cries out “Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him”? That is the importance of this text. A spoken word is preached and heard. It is received with faith burning bright or it is cast aside.

We now consider the ten virgins. The virgins in this parable do not describe a physical state of specific people. The spiritual meaning is that the virgins are all Christians gathered in the Church. They are pure because they are called and gathered

by the Holy Spirit into the Church. They are clothed in clothing belonging to a virgin because they are set apart, or more specifically, are made pure by the Blood of the Lamb. Elsewhere in Scripture, we see that people are given wedding garments to wear on the Last Day. Therefore, the ten virgins represent all Christians in their baptismal purity. This includes you, dear Christian. This also teaches us that there are some Christians who are wise and some Christians who are foolish with that gift of Baptism. Again, this does not signify the intellectual ability of a person. It means that some were spiritually foolish with their faith while others were spiritually wise.

The lamp given to you to hold and to keep burning is your baptism placed upon you by the Word of the Lord. It is the salvation that was given to you that day in the precious name of the Trinity. The flame of the Word was lit on the day of your baptism. This is why many congregations have the tradition of giving out a candle to the newly baptized. You were called a virgin in the family of faith on the day you received this precious gift of baptism. For adults who came to faith, it would be the day of your first confession as a Christian. You can easily point to your baptism day as the day that you were counted as one of the faithful virgins in the Christian Church. It wasn't your act, but God's action accomplished in you.

Now we can see that all of us are counted among the ten virgins and each of us has a lamp. It wasn't given to you empty, but it is meant to be used, not hidden away. The oil that the Lord provides is faith. When you receive the preaching of His holy Word, you are replenishing that oil again and again. You are taking that oil and putting it to use when you let your confession burn bright. See the connection! Faith is given to you through the hearing of His Word. That faith produces a visible, outward confession in both word and deed done to the neighbor (you'll hear more about this in the next two Sundays). This lamp is yours to hold, to cherish, and to keep burning all the days of your life. This is the gift of God that keeps us united to Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Now let's consider what happened to the virgins as they waited. The bridegroom was delayed. Remember, He is delayed according to our time, but the bridegroom is never late according to His time. What happened to the virgins? They fell asleep! Do you know what this is? Think of the life of a Christian. Sometimes we are really active in our faith, truly serving our neighbor at any opportunity. Other times, we are tired or even bored with studying God's Word. There are times when our ears do not want to hear

good preaching about God's Word. We would rather hear things that make us feel better about ourselves, or sermons that don't show me my sin or call me to repent. That is what foolish virgins in the Church do. They have heard the Word for their salvation, but then they want to fill their ears (or their extra bottle of oil) with the empty words of this world. They want to fill their bottles with the idea that they can purchase salvation "when needed." They are deceived in thinking that the Christian faith is about an inner feeling or emotion. When the Last Day comes, they realize that their faith is gone, the confession is no longer burning, and they are not ready to see Jesus face to face.

This is a sad part of our text. This also means that there are some Christian friends that we know who will not enter into eternal life. Those who are trusting in their own good works, those who are living by their emotions, or those who are deceived by the teachings of this world will not enter into eternal life. Faith is offered to all, but not all people receive faith the way that the Lord gives it. Like the foolish virgins, some people will want to enter into the feast with Jesus, but Jesus will say to them, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you." He will come to judge the living and the dead. This is sad for us and we rightfully mourn and pray for their return to faith. We want to see others enter into eternal life, but if they reject the promise of salvation, then Jesus will close the door on them. This teaches us that Jesus wants faith to be taught correctly as a gift which is given by the Holy Spirit so that the confession burns bright in a dark world.

With that said, did you notice that even the "wise" virgins fell asleep? Even those who memorize the catechism and large parts of the Bible have times when they "fall asleep" spiritually. This happens. But this is why we do not live alone as Christians. We live in a family of faith so that we can help each other stay awake. We call each other to come and hear the Word of the Lord together, even when a friend of ours might not want to hear it at the moment. We keep calling to one another to gather around the altar of the Lord so that we can receive His gifts with joy. When you haven't seen a brother Christian who hasn't attended in a while, it's ok to say, "I haven't seen you at the Lord's table. I pray all is alright." As a family, we hold each other accountable. As Jesus teaches, we hear that we need to repent and believe the Gospel. Our soul wakes us to fill our bottle with the Word of the Lord again and again. That is what a wise virgin does. She knows that the days of this life are long and that she will be tired. But she prepares for those days by filling her bottle with the promises and Word of God. She rejoices to

hear that Jesus came to earth, lived among us, suffered and died in our place for our sins, has paid the price of salvation with His precious blood, and risen from the dead to open the door of heaven for our salvation. When Jesus comes, the wise virgin will be ready to see Him face to face.

By returning to the Divine Service with frequency, you are filling your lamp up with the oil of faith that comes from the hearing of God's Word. You are filling your ears with the preaching of the Word from this pulpit. You are filling your soul with the Body and Blood of Christ from this altar. When you are away too long, you begin to lose your supply of oil for the lamp. When we gather together, we are filling the lamp with oil. We are also encouraging one another to "stay awake!" When we are awake, the Word of the Lord is active in us. It is defending us from the darkness of this world and the lies of the devil. The flame will not go out and the oil will never cease. The Holy Spirit continues to pour oil into your bottle each time we gather around this altar. Do not cease gathering together, lest you fall asleep without faith to shine on the Last Day.

How beautiful your baptism is! You are called by name into the family of God. You are purified by the Blood of the Lamb and given wedding garments. You are pure like a virgin. There is no second or third baptism. The first baptism by water and the Word is the promise of God that fills your soul. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church. We are benefactors of that day. We are invited to the feast on the Final Day. Our baptismal lamps are burning bright. Our bottles are filled with the Word of God that give us faith. We stand ready to receive our Lord Jesus Christ. Our ears are waiting for that final cry "Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." And the Church prays, "Come, Lord Jesus, Come." Amen.