Always Ready

24th Sun. after Pent. - 11/08/26 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Text: Matthew 25:1-13 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 13, **[Jesus said,] "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."**

Introduction

✠ Growing up with my Dad as a Boy Scout leader, and my two brothers and myself all being Eagle Scouts, we knew well the Boy Scout motto: "Be prepared". Now, as an adult, in our current family, I think Mary Beth and the kids would say that much of the time I might have taken that motto a bit too seriously.

➔ For just a short hike or a one-day fishing trip into the mountains, I always made sure that we were carrying a first aid kit, water, food, raingear, emergency blankets and more.

✠ But I wasn't always like that. I still laugh when I remember one of my earliest backpacking trips as a young scout. My camping partner, Nick Norman and I, thought that we were especially smarter than the rest of our troop when we broke off as partners one night to plan out menus and supplies for the 3½ day trip up near Cameron Pass.

➔ Our priority was not "being prepared" but getting done quickly so that we could go outside and join in the games that were going for those pairs that were done planning for the trip.

➔ So Nick and I came up with a "brilliant plan". "We're only going to be gone for 3½ days," one of us said. "So, who cares about variety in our menu," the other said. "If we have variety we'll just have to pack more cooking supplies and spend a lot more time planning."

So we both agreed, "Let's just buy a whole bunch of hotdogs and eat hotdogs for every meal – no buns, no condiments (that would be extra work). "We'll just cook them on sticks and drink water from the stream."

➔ We were both so proud of our "wisdom" that we bragged about it to others.

➔ Well, we got a day and half into our 3½-day trip and we realized we had already eaten almost all of our hotdogs; besides the fact that we were both developing a couple of seriously upset stomachs. No, we were not well prepared Scouts. Instead, we were lazy, preoccupied and foolish young boys.

➔ Fortunately Nick's dad and my older brother were our scoutmasters and both of them had caught wind of our plan, though they apparently agreed not to say anything to us before the trip. Yet, if it were not for the fact that they both packed extra food and supplies for us, we would have been a couple of real hurting and hungry campers.

✠ Today, in our Gospel Reading, Jesus uses a similar type of story, from His culture, to teach us as Christians the importance of being prepared for something far more critical than a backpack; or even life in general.

➔ Jesus teaches that we must always be prepared; always be ready for The Day that He comes to take us, as His bride, to be with Him in Paradise.

I. Bride and Groom

✠ He uses the marriage practices and customs of His day to talk about our relationship with Him.

➔ You see, both the Old and New Testaments use the marriage relationship to describe our spiritual relationship with the LORD.

➔ Isaiah 62:5 says, "…as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." And Hosea 2:19 shows God's deep love for us, as He takes the initiative and says, "And I

will betroth you to Me forever. I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy."

➔ Paul speaks of Jesus' sacrificial love for His church as the model for husbands and wives, when he says in Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her".

➔ And finally in Revelation 21:2, the entire body of believers in the "New Heaven and Earth" is described as being "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

✠ You see, this image of Jesus as our groom in today's parable paints a beautiful picture of His adoring, unconditional and sacrificial love for all of us as His bride.

II. We do not know the day

✠ Yet that is not actually the central message that Jesus wants you and me to get from this parable today. His deep love; that's just a given in this text.

➔ Instead, it is our preparedness for the day when He returns to take us, as His bride, into the marriage banquet for eternity.

✠ This is where the Scout motto has good application, "Always be prepared".

➔ And why? because as Jesus says in verse 13, "You know neither the day nor the hour" of His return.

✠ You see, this addresses both the time of our earthly death and the day of Christ's second return. Because either way, when it happens to you or me, that is the "day" or "hour" for which we must already be prepared. None of us knows when that day or hour will actually come.

➔ 26 years ago, my sister, Ann had just completed a weekend of volunteer work at the 9Health Fair in Greeley. She came home with her husband, sat down to relax for just a few minutes, and then got up to prepare dinner. But, before she could walk the 15 feet from their living room to the kitchen, her heart just burst and her hour to be with Jesus had arrived.

➔ In a matter of seconds, with absolutely no previous warning, her husband went from "married" to "widower". It was totally unexpected, since she was only 52-years-old and relatively healthy. But the good news is that she was prepared for Jesus to come at any time. Her lamp was lit and she had a full supply of the oil of grace and faith in Jesus. And because of that, she is now with Jesus, her eternal Groom in Paradise as He now prepares for His promised return on the Last Day.

III. Don't be foolish

✠ But sadly, not all people are ready! Perhaps even some of us here today are not truly ready for the hour and day of Christ's return.

✠ This is why Jesus tells us His parable about both the wise and the foolish virgins; especially emphasizing the foolishness of those without the oil of faith.

➔ You see in their day, the travel torches or lamps had to be refilled about every 15 minutes. So it wasn't that the groom was unreasonably slow in coming.

✠ Jesus isn't allowing these ladies any kind of excuse. He calls them "foolish" for a reason, because the extent of their unpreparedness was obvious to everyone who lived in that day.

➔ Imagine, here in our day, that you had some very special guests coming to town for Thanksgiving, and it was your job to go and pick them up at the airport. You of course make sure that you've got enough gas in the car; you know which airline terminal and baggage carousel they'll be at. You even check to make sure their flight is on time.

So you get in the car; you get to the airport; you park the car; you get into the airport early; and you greet your guests with hugs and kisses all around. You help them get all of their baggage into the car, you pay for parking and you head home. You have diligently prepared for all of the peripheral things, but when you arrive home and pull into the driveway you suddenly realize – you left your guests standing at the airport.

➔ I know; that sounds absolutely foolish! But that's the point of Jesus' parable. Dr. Lenski says in his commentary on this text, "A foolish act has no sensible explanation."

➔ These women where foolish; they were not prepared and as the text says, "the door was shut" (v. 10). Jesus had come but they didn't believe in Him for salvation. They thought they had more pressing things to attend to, so that, in the end, they missed out on eternal Paradise. Once that day comes my friends, if we miss out, we can't go buy faith and come back for a second chance. No, Jesus says to those with such an attitude in verse 11, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you."

➔ Many today, want to blame Jesus for unbelievers missing out. But, He came! He gave all that was needed, including these warnings in His Word. He opens the door and He invites all to come in by His grace; by His saving work. And He is clear; it is the unbelievers who are the foolish ones because they rejected His gifts; making them unprepared.

✠ Enough about the stories: Let's think about the real Biblical facts we know about Christ's return and our salvation.

➔ Jesus suffered and died in our place on the cross – to pay for our sin. He rose again to life in victory over death, and now He promises that we too will rise; so that, as Paul said in our Epistle Reading, "we will always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17).

➔ All of this, our Bridegroom gives to us free of charge; free of any effort and works on our part. The foolish virgins are told that the oil required can only be attained from the designated dealers.

✠ It's the same with God's grace and His gift of saving faith. You can't earn it; you can't buy it; you can't just conjure it up in your imaginations; or get it from any of a plethora of religious options. No, God has given us His particular means; His specific conduits through which He dispenses His oil of grace and faith.

➔ In fact we call them the "means of grace"; the specific ways through which God has promised in His Word that He comes to us and gives us the benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection. There are three of them:

1st) His inspired and perfect Word; Holy Scripture; where He reveals to us all that we need in Law and in Gospel to grant us repentance and to fill us with saving faith in Jesus;

2nd) In the water and Word of Holy Baptism where He drowns our sinful nature; cleanses us from sin; and gives the Holy Spirit with His gift of saving faith; and

3rd) In His true body and blood; given in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, where He regularly feeds and keeps us strong in the faith until the day that we see Jesus face to face.

✠ These are the facts! These are the free gifts that you and I need in order to keep our torch of faith lit and ready for Jesus.

➔ They cost no money and Jesus offers them to everyone. Simply put, there is no earthly reason why a person can't always have a full and constant supply of these gracious, saving and eternal gifts.

➔ So, yes; to reject this oil; to neglect this gift; to let the concerns and desires of this world keep us from being prepared – it is just what Jesus calls it in the parable – "foolish".

IV. The Wisdom of God

✠ Yet we see that the wise virgins kept first things first. They knew that even if they had their lamps with them, they would be worthless without the oil to burn and provide light. So wisely, they could not give the oil they had been given away. My faith can't save you nor can your faith save me.

➔ Each one of us must remain ourselves closely connected to God's means of grace in order to be prepared and always ready for the day or hour of Jesus' coming.

✠ So how do we do that? Well, in Ephesians 3:10 Paul says that it is "through the church [that] the manifold wisdom of God" is "made known."

➔ And in Colossians 3:16 Paul encourages Christians to be wise in worship. He says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

➔ And we have this advice from James (1:5), "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

Conclusion

✠ So, to be wise is to receive wisdom directly from God.

➔ To be prepared is to continuously receive God's grace in Word and Sacrament.

➔ To be both wise and prepared is to be saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

➔ And to be saved by Jesus is to use God's grace (His oil); to shine His light always; to watch and be always ready for His coming; today, tomorrow and until the hour when Jesus comes to you and to me to take us to be with Him in eternal Paradise!

✠ This is the preparedness that fills us with great joy and anticipation. My friends, may the certainty of Jesus' coming fill each of you with the joy of His grace every moment of every day. Amen.