

26TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (Proper 27)
November 9, a.D. 2008
Matthew 25: 1 – 13

On the night our Lord was betrayed, he went out to a garden to pray. He was awake all night. He never slept. His heart was heavy with sadness for it was the night of Preparation for the Paschal Lamb to be slaughtered on the Passover. The Father in heaven was filling the cup of wrath for his son to completely empty.

That was the night Jesus asked his friends to watch and pray. That meant to stay awake. No snoozing. No cat naps. Don't give in to temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak. Twice the Lord returned to the disciples and found them sleeping. After praying the third time he came back to them and found them sleeping again but this time was the end. The hour of judgment was at hand. The Son of Man was going to be man-handled by sinners and the betrayer was moistening his lips for a kiss of death.

The disciples could not stay awake. The eyes of temptation had grown heavy with the cares and lusts of the flesh. So in the same way the ten virgins all fell asleep. Everyone of them did not have the strength to fight against the sinful flesh. They too were fast asleep when the final call came.

Don't think for a minute that the five foolish virgins didn't consider themselves Christian. All ten considered themselves Christian for this is a parable of the church not of the world. All ten were baptized and confirmed and spoke their vows that they would ever be watchful for Christ, vigilant to the end and never fall into the sleep of temptation.

But even though all ten were wearing their white gowns and had once spoken beautiful vows of faithfulness and perseverance, they all failed. All ten could not keep watch. The eyes grew too heavy from watching the pleasures of this world. They all broke the holy law of God.

Then the call came at midnight. The law of God terrifies the sleepy heart when the judgment comes because then it will be too late to repent. Too late to say you are sorry and ask God for a second chance. The time of God's patience was at an end. The door of the ark was closed and the flood of God's judgment drowned the flesh of all sinful man and beast.

Yet in the days of Noah, eight souls were found inside the ark. So too when the midnight call roused everyone from deep sleep that the bridegroom had finally come, five virgins went into his bridal chamber and were welcomed. Five were not. And remember these five considered themselves Christian.

What can we say about all ten virgins? They all fell asleep. None kept watch. They all needed to be wakened with the call to repent for none are worthy. They all sinned.

Five were foolish in that they brought no extra oil. Sure they had enough oil at first but it did not last. Now if the oil is faith, then what good is it to believe at first but run out when the midnight Master arrives? The burst of joy and enthusiasm of Christian converts also comes to an end. The time for testing was at hand.

Despite their white baptismal gowns, beautiful confirmation vows and all the trappings of having their Christian lamps right beside them, they foolishly put off repenting until another day thinking they had lots of time to prepare for the Bridegroom to come! They judged by their reason that they had lots of time to get ready or that the Lord is not coming at all and life is only about doing good to your neighbour.

Fools! Tonight the Lord comes to ask for your soul. What then with all good works, sincere emotions and earthly wealth? Can any of these things pay for your soul and buy a ticket into the bridal chamber?

The wise virgins also failed to keep the holy law of God and fell asleep on their watch. They too were not vigilant when their Lord came and are not worthy of eternal life. They too were terrified when the midnight call came, catching them in the sinful sleep of the flesh.

Yet they were welcomed into the wedding banquet. They believed that their Lord and Master was good, that He loved them and that He accepted them. Contrary to all the evidence of the law, beyond what their own hearts were telling them that they do not deserve to be invited into the heavenly feast, they believed that the Lord still loves them and that He is coming back for them.

This is the way that appears to be foolishness to the world. For the world says that everyone has to get themselves ready for the hour of judgment. Or that since it has

taken so long, perhaps there is no judgment at all and we must decide what our own fate will be and how we should live our own lives.

The devil is a master of lies. First he entices with all of the lusts of the flesh and if they do not make the oil run out, then come the lies that maybe all this talk about the Lord's return is only talk. If Jesus has not returned in two thousand years, maybe he's not coming at all. How can you base your hopes on fragments of writings of human origin, thousands of years old, which could turn out to be fantasy, hero worship and all a complete farce? Couldn't all this Christian talk be made up by men to give false hope to a miserable human existence? Don't wait for Christ. He's not coming. Don't waste your time on Him, with His word or these empty rituals at church. Live for yourselves. Make your own realities. Do what you want.

You have heard these lies before. You have considered what risk it is to believe and calculated if you can have the best of both worlds. Repent O foolish sinners! Be a child and don't be afraid to appear as a fool to the world and say, I believe in Jesus and that he's coming again to take me home just as he said he would in the bible. He died for me and rose again and is coming back for me. I will go about my life as best as I can, living under his grace, asking for forgiveness and waiting for the time when there will be no more doubt or despair.

The five wise virgins went in to the bridal chamber as though they never fell asleep. They did sin but they believed that the forgiveness of Christ was greater and that He delivered them from the sleep of death. For Christ Jesus neither slumber nor sleeps. His eyes are always on his beloved bride the church. He gives you forgiveness by the mouth of his pastors and found in the bread and wine of his heavenly feast. This is his wisdom.

You too believe in Him and want to be with him. Now you want to stop sinning and want to please him. This is the faith he has given you. He saves you by his faithfulness, by his staying awake and by his body and blood that he offers you freely here and now until He comes again.