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Trinity Lutheran Church
Decatur, Illinois
3rd Last Sunday Of Ch Year
November 8th, 2020

THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH

God's PEACE is ALWAYS YOURS in Jesus.

Hear the Word of God from Matthew 25,

“Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

The focus of the last three Sundays of the church year is on The End Times, and the Last Day – the Day of our Lord's Return. Just as there was a beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, so there will also be an end of this created world and universe, when Jesus comes again to create new heavens, and a new earth, the home of the righteousness.

Whenever you start to talk about the end of the world, or the end of all things, it makes people a bit nervous, edgy, even weird! End times stuff may be great for actions movies, and fiction novels – like the popular ‘Left Behind’ series – which is definitely fictional; but the reality of the end is more than most people care to consider. It is a bit scary when we read, hear, and confess that “*He (Jesus) will come again, to judge both the living and the dead.*” Thankfully, the Good News of God's Word reminds us that Jesus' shed blood has washed away all of our sins, and Jesus' righteousness, covering us through faith, declares that we are even more than just forgiven, we are innocent in God's sight - as righteous and innocent as Jesus.

Nevertheless, we are anticipating the second coming of Jesus, which will be both a day of wrath and mercy. It will be a day of wrath against those who are still in their sins through unrepentance and unbelief – essentially blowing off Jesus. And it will be a day of mercy for those who repent of their sins, and take Jesus up on the deal, that they are forgiven by His blood, and innocent in His righteousness.

In our Old Testament lesson, Amos makes it quite clear to those who live in smug complacency, and blowing off Jesus, Amos says that the day of the Lord will be like, ***“Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord!...That day will be for you, darkness and not light! It will be as though a man fled from a lion, only to meet a bear, or (as though he fled from a bear) entered his house, and rested his hand on the wall, only to have a snake bite him.”*** It’s a picture of inescapable judgment for those who have no time or space for that Jesus stuff. And don’t think for one second that just *“going through the motions of religion”* is going to bail you out. The sinners only hope is told to us in Joel 2, 12-13, ***“Yet, even now,’ declares the Lord, ‘Return to me with all your heart – with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Rend your hearts, and not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God. For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love, and He relents from sending disaster.”*** Repentantly returning to the Lord is our *‘Get Out Of Hell Free’* card!

Paul then flips the coin to the Gospel side, or the Jesus side, in 1st Thessalonians. He tells us that the day of the Lord is the Day of Jesus’ re-appearing. Jesus disappeared from our sight at His Ascension – NOTE: He didn’t leave us or forsake us, He just disappeared from our sight. In fact, when Hebrews 13 says, ***“I will never leave you or forsake you,”*** do you know what Jesus actually says in the Greek? Listen closely. Hebrews 13 literally says, ***“I will never, never, never, never, never leave you or forsake you!”*** Jesus simply disappeared from our sight at His Ascension, to enter back into His glory – a glory so overwhelming that we can’t currently see Him in our sin, and yet live. You see, Jesus won the war over our sins at the cross, Colossians 1, ***“God reconciled the world to Himself, by making peace through Christ’s blood shed on the cross.”*** He won the war over the devil by His death. Hebrews 2, ***“He (Jesus) shared in our flesh and blood, so that by His death He might destroy the one who held the power of death – that is the devil.”*** And Jesus won the war over our death by His resurrection. John 14, ***“Because I live, you will live also.”*** Page 2

Now Paul tells us that this same Jesus, Who removed His ‘visible’ presence from us, yet without leaving us, will, on the last day, re-appear—visibly, publicly and glorious. On that day all of the dead will be raised. The unbelievers will rise to be condemned. But, both the dead in Christ who are raised, and the living ones who trust in Christ, will all be changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye. Then He will take us to Himself, and we will be with the Lord forever. This is our lively hope – and it will be the vindication of our faith in the eyes of the unbelieving world.

Now when Jesus comes for His bride, the Bible teaches us it will be suddenly, and without warning, like lightning, like a thief in the night, or like a groom kicking off his wedding at the ridiculous hour of midnight. But Paul is giving us the “Jesus side” of the last day. For us, it is not the dreadful day of darkness that Amos saw; but a bright and glorious in which Jesus wedding with His forgiven bride commences in all of its’ eternal and heavenly glory. It will not be a secret rapture or disappearing, as some believe, it will be loud and visible. First, it will be visible. Matthew 24, ***“As the lightning, which flashes in the East is visible even in the West, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.”*** Revelation 1, ***“And every eye shall see Him.”*** It will also be loud. 1st Thessalonians 4, ***“And He will come again with a loud command, the shout of the archangel, and the trumpet call of God.”***

It will be a great and glorious day, for those who are IN CHRIST. For Christ’s bride, the Day of our Lord’s Return, will be a day of resurrection, renewal, and reunion. The dead in Christ rise from their graves. The living in Christ are renewed – that is, made totally new again, perfect and sinless. And we are gathered together, reunited with Christ, and with all who are in Christ, and so shall we ever be with the Lord! The Day of the Lord is the Day that Sin, Death, and the Devil are finally and forever trampled under Jesus’ feet, for the sake of His bride, the church (ie. Ephesians 1:18f)

So, what should our perspective be, as we live in these end times, waiting for our Savior’s return? How should we live as ‘End-Times’ people? Jesus’ parable of the Ten Virgins tells us how. Jesus says, ***“The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom.”*** What could possibly go wrong? Jesus says, ***“But the bridegroom delayed His coming.”*** On no! This wasn’t in the plan. Now we’re going to have to fight our sins, and hold onto Jesus a lot longer than we thought. **Page 3**

Now, the Bridegroom, Jesus, doesn't delay His wedding day, to His trusting bride for the fun of it. There's a reason. The reason is He's still working to woo others into also being His trusting bride. 2nd Peter 3, "***I desire that no one should perish, but that all should come to repentance.***" That's why our Bridegroom has delayed His second coming, and our Wedding day for now.

The question for us is: "*Will we, His trusting bride, call off the wedding, and return the wedding gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation, because our bridegroom has put the wedding on hold, while he tries to save others?*"

Notice, Jesus says that, "***Five of the virgins were foolish, and five were wise.***" The words '***wise***' and '***foolish***' are the Bible's way of saying 'believing' and 'unbelieving'. God's Word says in Proverbs, "***the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. But the fool says in his heart, 'There is no god.'***"

The foolish virgins took their lamps, but very little oil; while the wise virgins took their lamps and plenty of oil, to make sure they would be ready for the Bridegroom's coming no matter when it happened. The foolish think they have plenty of time to blow off the things of salvation – Baptism, the Word of God, and the Lord's supper – that provide the oil of faith and the Holy Spirit in the lamps of our hearts. And so, by cutting themselves off from the means of grace, they run out of oil. They run out of faith when the bridegroom finally arrives.

How does it happen in a very real sense in our lives? Here's how: Those who were strong in their well fed faith, and for whom Christ was once their first-love, begin to lay aside, forget, or take off their Baptismal wedding ring. Their marriage to Jesus continues to hit the skids as they spend less and less time with their bridegroom in worship and devotions. Pretty soon, the Bride doesn't listen to her Bridegroom, Jesus, talking to her anymore through the love-letter of His Word, and she doesn't talk to him anymore in prayer. Next, they stop having supper together, as the Bride cuts herself off from the Lord's Supper. She gets tired of hearing her Bridegroom say the same 'ole thing: "***I love you and forgive you, and I always will***". She says to herself, "*It's so boring to keep on hearing the same 'ole thing.'*" And, in the end, many fall out of love with their bridegroom, Jesus, and they lose their "Happily-Ever-After" in the Bridal Suite of heaven.

The devil and the world will try to end your marriage to Jesus. They'll attack you! "How crazy can you be to get up on Sunday mornings to 'hear your forgiveness' when you could worship at St. Matress instead?" "How foolish can you be to eat a bit of bread, and drink a sip of wine, believing it to be the body and blood of Jesus – never mind the fact that He backed up His words with His resurrection – when you could be partaking of the world's delicacies instead?" "It doesn't make any sense to live as though being married to Jesus is the only thing in life that finally matters?" "How silly can you be to give your first-fruits to your so-called bridegroom, when you could be spending all of that money on yourself?" To the world, our clinging to Jesus as our forgiving and life-giving Bridegroom is about as silly as Linus waiting for the Great Pumpkin to arrive on Halloween.

Nevertheless, those who trust in Jesus 'Bride-making blood' to make them the virgin pure bride of Jesus, and to give them a place at the Heavenly wedding feast to end all feasts, keep on availing ourselves to the love letter of our Bridegroom's word, and we keep on having supper with our Lord in His body and blood, and we joyfully wear the wedding ring of our Baptism, so that we're joyfully prepared to meet Him whenever He returns. We do so because we never want to risk all that our Lord has already given us, and all that He yet has to give us in heaven; but we also continue to pour the oil of Jesus' forgiveness, life, and salvation into us, because "***of that day and hour, of our bridegroom's return, knoweth no man, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.***" There's never a safe time to lose your bridegroom!

Our text says, "***when the Bridegroom delayed His coming, they all slumbered and slept.***" The giggling and wedding talk went on all day, while they waited for their bridegroom, until it finally turned into a slumber party, and they're all sacked out on couches. BUT, then it happens. "***At midnight came the cry: Behold! The Bridegroom is here! Come out to meet Him!***" And it's then that the real fools, and the truly wise will be seen. Our text says, "***Then all the virgins arose.***" For the wise, it's their wildest dream come true. Their wedding day has arrived. But for the fools, they didn't expect such a long wait, and they blew off the oil of Jesus' forgiveness, life, and salvation; and in their waiting they forgot and gave up on their bridegroom. The wise ones still have the oil of faith in their lamps, when Jesus returns to scoop us off our feet, and carry us across the threshold into the Bride suite of heaven forever. **Page 5**

It's on the last day that the folly of the foolish, and the wisdom of the wise will be revealed, not a day sooner. Until then, the foolish of the world, who blow off that Jesus stuff, seem to be the wise, the cool, the stylish, the chic, the strong, you name it. They appear so in control, so refined, so reasonable, so rational, so intelligent. That is, until the noise begins at midnight, until they wake up and realize they have no oil of faith in Jesus, in the lamps of their hearts, and the day of their judgment has arrived; and the door to the bridal suite in heaven is slammed shut, and locked. Oh, they HAD a place at the wedding party – ***“Christ died for all!”*** They had a seat at the wedding feast with their name on it, ***“Behold, the lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world.”*** But in their foolish figuring, they figured they had plenty of time to blow off their bridegroom, and enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. But on that day, all of their pounding on the door won't get them in. The bridegroom said, ***“I don't know you.”***

In the end, the wise ones are all those who, in their repentance, cling to their forgiving bridegroom Jesus, as if their lives depend on Him, and they get to go to the party to end all parties! While all of the bright, savvy, proud types who believed they had it all figured out, and were doing God a favor for even giving Him a passing glance at the offering to be married to His Son, Jesus, will find themselves out in the dark, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, over their refusal to be married to Jesus! The dreadful sentence they will hear on that day of our Bridegroom's return is: ***“Truly I say to you, ‘I do not know you!’”*** Robert Capon, an Episcopalian pastor, explained Jesus' words to the foolish, unbelieving like this: ***“And on that day, those who chose to make themselves invisible to God, by their rejecting of His accepting them; will have the sentence of their ‘self-chosen invisibility’ ratified by God.’***

Jesus ends His parable by saying, ***“Watch, therefore, for you do not know the day, or the hour, of His coming!”*** Yet, because of the cross, we wait with eager expectation. On that day, the wisdom of your faithfully holding onto your bridegroom through the long night of this world will be vindicated before the eyes of all. While our faith may seem as foolish to the world, as Linus waiting for the Great Pumpkin to appear, God promises us in Colossians 3:1, ***“And when Christ, WHO IS YOUR LIFE, appears, you also will appear with Him in Glory.”*** All in Jesus. Amen.

