

## Twenty-Third Sunday After Pentecost (2017)

**Matthew 25:1–13** “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 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.’ 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. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ **Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.**

In the Name of Jesus.

WHAT...A...RELIEF! Too often I read the Scriptures WITHOUT FIRST rejoicing in the claim of my Savior Jesus on me! My Baptism, His Passion, His Body and His Blood—His Church! And then I read something like this, ‘Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the

hour!,' and I feel like the squirrels, or nervous antelope on those horrible nature shows I like to watch. On a hair-trigger nervousness; sniffing, listening with big ears, for any HINT that the lioness or hawk is about to swoop down and destroy me! WATCH! YOU MUST PROTECT AND WATCH OUT FOR YOU!!!!

Says our Jesus, Who became King on the cross? Who FORCED HIMSELF into the Baptism of John with those confessing their sins? Who RACED to Galilee after His Rising, to send out the Eleven with the glad tidings of baptism and His teaching and His guarantee of His presence with us to the End?

The apostle calls on us to ENCOURAGE one another with the prospect of our Lord's return! The Lord Himself does not contradict that and say 'SCARE each other with My imminent return!'

So, take your poor pastor as the 'poster boy' for the reason such lessons as are in Matthew 25 are taught by our Savior! For, CLEAR-AL-LY, I do NOT know the day, NOR the hour! And I am so ready, so pre-wired, so factory-pre-set—it seems!—to turn to my OWN resources of reason or works or such FIRST AND FOREMOST! When that is the whole point of this teaching and the lessons for this glad Day of the Lord!

WE...is...the...PROBLEM, my dear ones! Our boundless OPTIMISM when it comes to OUR ability to manage our standing with the Ineffable God—our powers to ‘hurry up and git innit’—our magical fingers or feelings personality skills to massage the next being, even the UnSpeakable One!, to our benefit!

Along with our utter LACK OF CONFIDENCE in the GIFTS that the Spirit of Jesus gives to His Church!

The ‘wise maidens’ of the Kingdom of heaven have each a conscience at peace with heaven and her King! When the cry goes out, ‘Here is the Bridegroom!’, there is not need to turn on nose, ears, nerves, tense up muscles and race the mind to figure out how we’re going to get past THIS FINAL TEST! They simply rise and trim their lamps; for the whole reason they ARE what they ARE is that they have HEARD and they have REJOICED that the Bridegroom is on His Way! And so the whole business of the wedding and the feast and a happy welcome—that’s HIS BUSINESS, HIS PROBLEM, HIS INVITATION—UTTERLY...BENEATH the worry and concern of those heaven smiles at and considers ‘wise.’

The ALTERNATIVE, my dear ones—it’s not really an ALTERNATIVE at all! It’s ALL...WE...GOT! The ENDLESS rehearsing with out chatterboxes, churning in

our noggins the EXCUSES for all WE have done—the severe VERDICTS over so much of what so many have done to injure us, those we approve of—or, better, GAWD!

That's what we're pre-set to do every day, dear disciples. And we prove it by the days we spend, the days we waste. The prophet Amos called out for 'justice' to 'roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream!' Those waters and streams are HAPPY things, my friends! NOT RAGING FLASH FLOODS of condemnation and sentencing and fear.

So, my next sentence is intended to make you smile and be glad. YOU, my friend, are NOT ready for the Lord to return; but HE is!

HE...is ready...FOR...YOU! For HE is the King of heaven, not we! HE is well-pleasing to the Father—and so, then, we're covered! He did NOT come to call to repentance and watchfulness those who conclude THEY ARE EQUIPPED to protect and defend and excuse and justify themselves to themselves, to other creatures of a moment, or to the Everlasting! Nope! He came to smile at and call out, with good cheer, to those who can be ambushed and taken at ANY DAY OR HOUR because of their weakness, their inability, their own fault: Lift up your heads! Watch!

MEAN-ING: the man who sins against you and stirs up the senseless beast within—he's there on cue, according to plan! All in the hand of your King above, yet with you always, to the End of the Age! And your Lord HAS equipped you! With a Baptism of pardon and heavenly favor, to live with and even life FOR those who ALSO, like YOU!, need most of all today an acceptance that does not keep track of who has wronged who more! 'Freely you have received! Freely give!'

And the disappointment YOU prove to YOURSELF, and others, to be: WHERE is my love of neighbor?, my confidence in my Maker?—

The Lord Jesus has ALREADY saved you from the dead end of having to scurry around to make of yourself ANY-THING that you are not ALREADY! Fed and forgiv'n with His Body and His Blood, your eyes are now open, your ears and your new mind, your heart, to the call, 'Watch what I...AM...ACCOMPLISHING! Saving...even YOU!' And there's no end of those who can be cheered on with THAT Good News!

When we confess in the Nicene Creed that the Lord Jesus will come to judge the 'living and the dead,' it seems that the fathers of the church intended two things with that. One, as we heard in the epistle today: that the dead in

Christ will be raised first, and that we who are still alive when Jesus appears this morning, will be changed and lifted up and with Him as He's always said—for good!

But the Creed has a second and, perhaps, more vital meaning. There are living AND dead walking around now! And living AND dead in the ground. The five foolish maidens fell asleep dead; but the five wise fell asleep alive!

If we are NOT...ALREADY in the wedding feast, we will never get there! THAT goal-seeking, that BINDING, RE-LIGION, FEEDS on the worry and fear and insecurity of those who ALREADY DON'T trust the Gospel. 'Come to church more! Give more money! Show OFF more to others! Memorize the whole Bible! Wanna learn Hebrew?!' ARGGGGHHHH!

POW'R-FUL draw; pow'rful religion; all around us to see!

YOU, my dear baptized, are ALREADY IN! For HE is there, preparing a place...FOR...YOU! He LIVES to intercede for you! He ROSE to make His Father ALL...ABOUT...YOU! He sent His Spirit—YOUR SPIRIT NOW!—to guide you into all truth, and to pardon you for daily sins, and to pardon you at the last as He pardoned you already!

And HE, your King, your Savior, your Brother, your Substitute and the Bridegroom of YOU, the Church!—

He is ONLY...COMING...BACK...

For you! To accept you and welcome you and assure you and pledge Himself to you, AND His Father, your Father, AND His Kingdom, YOUR Kingdom!

And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long, this call to watchfulness is ONLY sent out to make you GLAD!

YOU will NEVER have readiness for the Last Day in your hands! For your Savior has it all, has YOU, in His hands!

Watch! In other words, REJOICE in the Name of Jesus! Amen!