

Lectionary Bible Study Our Savior Lutheran Church

Lectionary 32, 2020

Readings and Psalm

Amos 5:18-24; Psalm 70;

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13



[Click here](#) to join Pastor Mark for a Live Zoom conversation each Wednesday at 10am.

Meeting ID: 868 8793 0554, Password: 654321

Or dial in for audio only: 1-301-715-8592

Matthew 25:1-13 (NRSV)

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ 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, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look, here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' ⁷ Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹ But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' ¹⁰ And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹ Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹² But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' ¹³ Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

The parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids is found only in Matthew's Gospel. The parable is placed in the middle of Jesus' teaching about the end times (24:1 -- 25:46). Jesus is speaking to his disciples while sitting on the Mount of Olives, looking at the Temple grounds (24:1-3). He has left the temple and the verbal battle with the scribes and Pharisees. The disciples come to Jesus privately (24:3) to ask Jesus about the signs of the end of the age. Jesus uses several analogies to stress the need to live faithfully and expectantly, to watch and remain ready.

The image in this week's parable of the bridegroom is found in both the Old and New Testaments to describe the covenantal relationship between God and God's people. (Hosea 2:14-23; Isaiah 62:5; Revelation 22:17). A typical ritual at a wedding would have the bridegroom coming with his companions to the house of the bride's parents to take her to his own home. As the groom approaches, the bridesmaids would come out with lighted lamps and meet him.

1. *How do you picture that scene?*
2. *How helpful or meaningful is the image of bride and bridegroom to describe the relationship between God and people?*

Consider some striking dis-similarities between this parable and earlier parables of Jesus:

- it does not cut against social or religious expectations;
- it does not surprise or shock his first listeners - instead it would confirm their conventional wisdom that the foolish are punished and the prepared are rewarded;
- there is no unexpected twist in the story;
- the story lacks humour, paradox, new insight;
- it concludes with a closed, impenetrable boundary - clearly separated insiders from outsiders.

3. *Does this parable seem out of place in comparison to Jesus' other parables in Matthew?*

4. *What issues is this parable seeking to address?*

For Matthew and his community, concerns about judgement upon the return of the Son of Man and the delay in Christ's return were high. Scholars debate over if this may have more of a concern for Mathew than it was for Jesus. Some have suggested the differences between this parable and others hint that Matthew may have been taking liberties with Jesus words. We will never know. What we do know is that Matthew wanted the faithful to live in a perpetual state of being ready.

The parable begins with grace. At first, all ten bridesmaids, wise or foolish, are equal members of the wedding party. All are to be included in the celebration. Both the foolish and the wise are prepared for the ordinary, usual events. But as in other parables in Matthew, grace calls for a "wise" response.

5. *How does grace inspire response?*

6. *How does understanding and owning grace prepare us for the unexpected?*

7. *Can you think of another parable of Jesus in Matthew that talks about being wise/prepared or foolish/unpared?*

The challenging question for the church of Matthew's day (and for the church today) is: How are we to live during the "in-between" time – the time between the inbreaking of the kingdom of heaven in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the promised coming of the victorious Christ at the end of the age? Do we trust in One whose presence is not readily seen? The answer Jesus speaks in Matthew's Gospel is to live a life of active faithfulness, of *doing* what we *believe*.

8. *What are the characteristics of a faithful disciple who waits and prepares for Christ's coming?*

9. *What does it mean to live a life of active faithfulness?*