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Homiletics II  
Parable Sermon  
March 22, 2007

Matthew 25:1-13

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So, how's it going to end? That's a question that I ask myself sometimes when I'm watching a really good movie. I'm always wondering where the story will go, and where the characters will end up when it's over. Sometimes it ends in ways no one could possibly guess, and other times it's so predictable you wish you never bothered with it. It's funny, because when I'm watching a movie, I don't actually want to know the answer until it happens, but with the things of this world, I'd like nothing more than to know all there is to know about it. The end of the world: it's something that most people have thought about from time to time, and hopefully Christians can look at it with a smile on their face. There is definitely a sense of mystery and intrigue when we think about the end times, and everything that's involved with it.

In our text, we encounter one of Jesus' many parables dealing with this subject. Here he teaches the Parable of the Ten Virgins to his disciples. In the preceding chapter, they had been asking Him about the end of the world, and our Lord gave them a small glimpse of what to expect, mainly stressing the fact that no one knows the day and the hour of His return. He shares with them this parable to further that teaching, using an example of a wedding feast. There are ten virgins, but two different groups of them. They are all waiting for the bridegroom to return and take them to the wedding feast, but not all are prepared for the wait. Five of the virgins have enough oil to last them through the night, while the five others do not. As we see in verse 5, all of them fall asleep, because

the bridegroom is delayed in coming. They wake up quickly to the announcement of his arrival, and at once, the five unprepared virgins realize they don't have enough oil for their lamps. These five did not take the necessary precautions for a long wait, and they wake up with dread as they recognize it. In verse 7 they plead with the wise virgins for some oil, but it is clear that there just isn't enough to share, and that if they give any of theirs away, they will run out too quickly. They tell the five foolish virgins to go out and buy some more, which ends tragically. By verse 11, the five wise virgins have been welcomed into the feast, while the five foolish virgins have returned with more oil and begin to plead to be let in, calling to the bridegroom in vain. He tells them he does not know them, and refuses to open the door for them, so they are left outside and never given entry to the feast.

When reading this parable, we are again reminded that God has promised a triumphant return, and that He will take all believers with Him to eternal life. This is another example of a separation between believers and non-believers, the sheep and the goats, the wise virgins and the foolish virgins. It is this classification that the parable uses to relay its message, and it is here also that can relate to all people. Throughout the history of our world, there have been billions of people who have lived and died on this planet. Some have died in the faith, while others have not. Believers can relate to the wise virgins, in the hope of clinging to the faith, knowing that Christ has forgiven them and will return for them in his time. Not only this, but those who believe in Christ can also know from Psalm 63, that as our souls cling to God, His right hand upholds us.

While this is comforting, it is also realistic to realize that despite all the help God gives us, we at times, as even the wise virgins did, fall asleep on the job. People can

easily be bogged down by the stresses of life, anything from work or school to our family or our relationships. It is in these day-to-day complexities that the true problem hides—the problem of sin. It's too easy to forget about God's all-powerful love for humanity, and focus on ourselves instead. All of the virgins fall asleep, but not all are prepared when they do. As we live this life, we often forget about the promised return of Christ, and can't see past our own self-inflicted schedules. A simple glance at just about anyone's daily planner would likely reveal a long list of things to do, but sadly may not even include a mere fifteen minutes a day to pray to God, or read His Word. The fact is, your human nature keeps you focused on the material and temporal aspects of life, and instead of keeping God's loving grace in your heart, you put up a shrine to yourself, or your property, or those around you. You value your personal time over helping your neighbor, or you prefer to wander off on your own paths, trusting in yourself to provide for the future, rather than trusting in your Lord and Savior, the Creator of all things.

As Christians, you need to be ready for Christ's return. But what does this involve? In the parable, the five wise virgins are considered wise based on the fact that they are prepared for the entire night, just in case it takes longer than expected for the bridegroom to come and get them. You, as Christians, can relate to this, because right now, you have what it takes to be ready for Christ when He comes back for us. He has given you a saving faith, through your Baptism, and through hearing His Word. You receive forgiveness for your sins through His body and blood, given by means of the bread and the wine at the Communion table. He has prepared you to be considered worthy to go with Him into eternity when He comes back.

But how is this possible? Have you done anything to deserve this? Absolutely not! Christ paid your admission, and it cost Him a great deal. He came to this world, took on the form of a human, and lived a perfect life, free of sin. He fled from temptation at every turn, something humans are far too weak to accomplish. Not only did He live a perfect life, but He gave it up for all people, in a most painful and horrific way. On the cross, Jesus Christ took your sins upon Himself, and suffered damnation in your place. Because of this, you will not be excluded from the benefits of eternal life. Just like the wise virgins, you are fit to attend the feast, even though you have done nothing of your own power to earn it.

So, what now? Wait it out, faithfully believing that Christ will come back at the right time and take all who believe to be with Him forever. In the mean time, there are millions of unbelievers in the world, including your neighbors, your coworkers, your friends, even the person driving in the car in front of you. Remember that you are saved through Christ's actions and His grace, and that you deserve nothing but death and damnation, which is exactly what waits for anyone who does not know him. He rescued you from these horrors by taking your punishment. Pray for the lost souls, and live your lives as examples of people who have been freed. Make them wonder, "what's so different about this guy?" or "so what does she have that's so special?" In the parable, the wise virgins know that sharing would not be beneficial, and it's heart breaking to read this. They know that if they give any of their oil away, they will be excluded from the feast too. Instead of sharing, they do the best they can, and tell the others to go buy more oil. You still have a chance though! You can still tell people about all that God has done for this world through His son Jesus Christ! His love is enough for all people, and His

sacrifice covered the sins of the entire world. No one is excluded from this promise, no one is too sinful, no one is unworthy to receive God's grace!

When we recite the Apostles' Creed, the line "and He will come again in glory, to judge both the living and the dead" serves as a reminder of these ideas. It is important to keep this in mind at all times, because as Christ teaches in this parable, no one knows the day or the hour. It could be any time. It's too easy to think it will happen years from now, or even generations from now. His return is imminent, because throughout the history of humanity, God has never left a promise unfulfilled. He will be back, and He will take all believers with Him. As nice as the idea of God saving all people is, there is no biblical basis to believe it. This parable, along with many other passages, clearly teaches that unbelievers will suffer hell for all eternity. This is so serious, it is only with God's help that we can successfully relay the severity of the situation to non-believers, that they will see His love, and come to realize that His grace is open to everyone.

So, how's it going to end? I can't answer that, and don't believe anyone who tries to tell you differently. No one knows the day or the hour. But we do know it will happen, and until it does, let us continue to keep our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Amen.