

Pentecost 24, November 12, 2023
Text: Matt. 25:1-13
Theme: "Silly and Sensible Maidens"

In the Middle East of Jesus' day, weddings were quite different. There were many people involved and all those people had a role to play in the wedding. Weddings also went on for several days depending on the wealth of the families involved, but in the end, they all ended the same way. The bridegroom came to the home of the bride. He was greeted by the bride's attendants and ushered to the bride whom he would then take away to his home.

Now knowing this, makes this parable a little clearer. The bride is not mentioned because if one has a bridegroom and bridal attendants, one can assume that there is a bride somewhere. Metaphorically, Jesus is the bridegroom, and if we read through the Old Testament, who is the Messiah's bride? The Church. So, who are these 5 silly and 5 sensible virgins or maidens? As the maidens attend the bride so there are those who attend the Church.

Of course, the metaphor breaks down a little because obviously the maidens are not the bride but those who attend the Church are also part of the Church. But moving on to being silly or sensible, today we focus on the day that we who attend God's Church hear the announcement – "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" Can you imagine how exciting that day will be? Everything we have

believed, taught, and confessed our whole lives will all come together on that day! All those sermons we sat through, all those times we knelt at the altar, all the time we spent in confirmation classes that we so loved and cherished! Everything will come together. All doubts will be swept away and we will finally live in the way and in the place that God wanted for us all along. We will finally inherit our kingdom.

But it is not always so easy to remain attentive as we wait for the groom to arrive. It has been close to 2,000 years since Jesus ascended into heaven and we just don't have that kind of attention span. We struggle to watch a whole movie in one sitting! We tend to drift and start forgetting what our role is. We get busy living in the wrong world and forget that we are strangers here, and our world is yet to come. And Jesus' warning is that living like that is like being a maiden who forgot to buy any extra oil and the lamp goes out too soon.

Jesus knows that it is not easy to wait. He knows that it is hard to remember that luxury cars, and cruises are nothing compared to the toys he has for us in heaven. He knows that we easily forget that IRA's are of absolutely no use to us if the oil in our lamps runs out before he arrives. He knows that we all suffer from spiritual ADD and that is why he gave us Baptism to keep the waters

of faith running over our heads constantly and reminding us moment by moment that this world is not our world. That is why he offers us his own body and blood. He doesn't live someplace outside of us and condemn us for our lack of attention. He physically enters us and empowers us to attend to His Church to keep our lamps full of oil. That is why he speaks to us over and over again through his word in sermons and Bible Study and Hymns and Songs and Psalms. He never stops. He will never stop until that day we hear the glorious words, "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!"

And what do we say about the silly maidens who bought no extra oil? I guess that is our challenge as we attend the bride. Not only do we stay close to God so that our oil supply never dries up but we work ceaselessly to draw others closer so that their lamps might be forever full as well. There will be some who will no doubt hear those horrible words from Jesus' lips, "I tell you the truth, I don't know you." But we strive to be certain that none will hear those words because we were too lazy or preoccupied or judgmental or stingy and we sat idly by and watched their lamps run dry comforting ourselves by saying things like, "well, everyone has a right to choose how to live their lives" or "who am I to tell another person how to live?"

Me? I'm going to tell everyone about the coming bridegroom. And if they think I'm weird and I don't fit into the world very well, that's okay. This isn't my world anyway. And I'm not going to sacrifice the bride so that I can have more stuff or a big bank account because when the bridegroom comes, all the material things on the earth will have all the worth and charm of rotten fruit and I would wonder, why didn't I store up my treasure in a place that wouldn't rust and rot?

Today, Jesus tells us that we have the opportunity to store up oil. We have the opportunity to encourage others to do likewise because he is coming soon. And when he comes, he will look for the light of brightly burning faith, and he will take all of us sensible attendants with our faith burning brightly and hotly to the place he has already prepared for us in paradise.