

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twenty-Fourth Sunday After Trinity, November 10, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 605, 604:1, 611:1-5, 609, 606.

Lessons: Proverbs 22:4-6, Romans 10:4-17, Luke 10:38-42.

Sermon Text: Matthew 25:1-13.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We read at the beginning of the previous chapter of Matthew's Gospel: *"As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately."* One of the questions they asked was *"what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"* (Mat 24:3 NIV)

"Jesus answered: 'Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. 'Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.'" (Mathew 24:4-14 NIV) Let me assure you that all these things have already happened.

Then Jesus goes on to tell of events which were fulfilled in the coming destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in 70 AD and of his coming in judgment on the last day. The destruction of Jerusalem is not recorded in Scripture, but the secular historian Josephus writes about it. Our sermon text is one of the parables Jesus tells, warning us to be ready, leading up to the picture of Jesus dividing the believers from the unbelievers like a shepherd divides sheep from goats and welcoming believers to eternal joy and happiness and sending those who rejected him as Savior to eternal damnation. Today, let's look more closely at Jesus' warning

"THEREFORE KEEP WATCH, BECAUSE YOU DO NOT KNOW THE DAY OR THE HOUR"

- 1. We see the picture of preparation for a wedding.**
- 2. Jesus will tell those not ready for his coming "I tell you the truth, I don't know you."**
- 3. How we must keep watch.**

Wedding customs among the Jews, up through the time of Jesus, are probably quite unfamiliar to us, and far different from the wedding customs of our time. To summarize, after a betrothal which often was as long as a year, on the day appointed, the bridegroom would go to the home of his fiancé's parents to get his bride. A wedding banquet may either be held there, or at the bridegroom's home. There was no set schedule for the activities of the day and the evening. Eventually, the couple would return to the home of the bridegroom, with a large group of people, where even more people were waiting for them to continue the celebration. Wedding celebrations often lasted for days.

Please remember that this was long before the electric lights we take for granted. Oil lamps were the normal method of light after dark. Jesus' parable speaks of ten young women – virgins – who were waiting for the bridegroom to come. This would have been at the home of the bridegroom, since this is the final event. In a similar way, Christ's coming to judge the living and the dead is the final event before eternity "begins" – if we

can speak of eternity “beginning”. By midnight, long into the night, when the bridegroom finally came, not all of the ten virgins were ready to meet him. They all knew he was coming, but not all of them were prepared. So, while five of the ten had enough oil for their lamps – having brought oil in jars in addition to what was in their lamps, five were not prepared. The difference is that five were wise, and five were foolish. The wise had fully prepared, and were ready. The foolish had to scramble to try to get ready. But there was no more time. That is illustrated by the picture of trying to go and find someone to sell them oil. ***“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.”***

One writer called virginity here a picture of “the profession of a pure faith”. He wrote “By these virgins, then, we are to understand all who profess to be waiting for the Son of God from heaven, and who do not by their deeds openly deny that hope”. The fact that all became drowsy and slept, suggests that all Christians fall into sin. But the foolish ones expected lots of time in which to repent – time which they really didn’t have.

You may remember the lesson from Scripture about the rich man who had such a good crop he had to tear down his barns and build bigger ones and thought he had a long time to live and enjoy his earthly possessions. He said ***“I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”*** (Luke 12:19 NIV) But it wasn’t going to be the way he expected. ***“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’”*** (Luke 12:20 NIV)

Like the five wise virgins we must be prepared every day – every moment – for the coming of Jesus Christ in judgment.

As a result of not being prepared, the door to eternal life will be shut, and Jesus will tell the bad news to those who are not ready for his coming ***“I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.”*** These are terrible words. ***“The door was shut.”*** Scripture goes on: ***“Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’ But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’”*** Jesus gives us the warning: ***“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”***

This is the horrible fulfillment of Jesus’ words of both promise and threat in Matthew chapter 10: ***“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”*** (Matthew 10:32-33 NIV) How easy it is to deny Jesus! Daily we have opportunities, often in public, sometimes just in our hearts – with only God and me aware of what is happening in my heart – to confess the truth: Jesus is my Savior and my treasure. We don’t know the moment Jesus is coming. When he comes in judgment, there will be no more time to prepare.

Let’s make a sort of comparison. I am sure that none of us has a suitcase packed so that we could walk or run away from our homes on the spur of the moment. Most of us probably don’t even have some emergency supplies ready and handy, but are waiting for a weather forecast or some warning so we could begin to get ready for some coming calamity, such as a blizzard, ice storm, tornado, hurricane, or a broken dam. Well, this weather forecast, this warning is being given right now, and is right in front of us every day in the scriptures: Christ is coming in judgment and you don’t know when! Our heavenly bridegroom is coming at any moment, and we don’t know when. Let’s be ready. Let’s be prepared.

So how do we prepare? Filling the gas tanks in our cars is not the solution. Having an emergency kit or a suitcase packed is not the solution. The answer is abundantly clear from scripture: ***“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*** (Mark 16:16 NIV) Then there is that other beautiful gospel summary: ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*** (John 3:16 NIV) Faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to be prepared. Relying on him every day, all day, for everything. And our gospel lesson summarized it this way: ***“but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”*** (Luke 10:42 NIV) ***“But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”*** (Luke 10:42 KJV)

We are tempted to sin and to reject Jesus Christ with many things and events each day of our lives in this world. Every day the obituaries are filled with people who have no more time to prepare for the second and final coming of Jesus Christ. But only one thing is necessary: the Word of God. For it is the Word of God alone which

works and creates the faith that saves. You heard in our epistle lesson: ***“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”*** (Romans 10:17) ***“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*** Every day we are faced with temptations to put Jesus second or third or last in our lives. Every day we are faced with choices. Where does Jesus come in those choices? How can we put Jesus first in our lives? How can we teach our children that Jesus is first, the most important thing, the ***“one thing needful”***? For it is that one thing that is needed, and Jesus assured Martha, ***“it will not be taken away”***. But we can throw it away, just as those unbelievers on judgment day did.

Our Old Testament lesson today has a powerful lesson and command for us: ***“Train a child in the way he should go.”*** Children are always learning, and much to our dismay, our children are often learning things we don’t want them to learn – learning the wickedness and evil in the world, being influenced by unbelievers around them, being led by those who do not share our conviction that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life, the only way to eternal life. The devil, the world, and the sinful flesh are surrounding us and even inside us to lead us away from God to the eternal damnation prepared for the devil and his wicked angels.

I think you all know that you must constantly be learning to get along in the world. Your job may require you to learn new things. Your health and illnesses may require you to learn new things. Making use of the earthly possessions God has provided for you may require you to learn new things.

And along the way, you must reinforce what you have already learned so you don’t forget it. And we are constantly being quizzed and tested by others, even about our religious convictions. And of course, your beliefs don’t just come from “the minister says”, or “the church says”. They come from a source that is unchanged and unchanging: the very Word of God. They come from “Thus saith the Lord!” They come from the words God has given you so that you might have eternal life and be fully prepared for it! That holy, inspired Word of God is the very reason you are here this morning. You are constantly being reminded of what you have learned from the Holy Scriptures, and, we pray, constantly learning new things, seeing more details in that vast tapestry, the whole big, beautiful picture of how God loved the world and gave a Savior so that we might be prepared for eternity. Isn’t it true that there are few things sadder than children grown into adults whose parents learned the truth of God’s Word but never passed it on to their children? If there is one inheritance you can and must pass on to your children it is the Word of God in its truth and purity, because that is the only inheritance they will really need – the one thing needful. You must fight the good fight every day and every night! God’s Word is our great heritage! Don’t neglect to pass it on to your children. It is a matter of eternal life and death! And don’t neglect to use the means of grace God has given us: the Gospel in the Word and the Gospel in the Sacraments.

May God give you the strength and courage to help your children prepare, using all the tools and means God has provided! May God keep you safe in his hands until he comes to judge the living and the dead! Amen.