**Matthew 25:1-13**

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. **2** Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. **3** For 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, they all became drowsy and slept. **6** But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ **7** Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. **8** And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ **9** 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.’ **10** 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. **11** Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ **12**  But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ **13**  Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

**“Sustained By The Grace Jesus Gives”**

In the Name of Him “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty”, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen (Rev 1:8). Fuel conservation is a hot topic for our age. Random bills to pay do not catch our eye, but everyone looks at what the price will be when filling up at the pump. Those who recently ran for elections know it was political suicide if they did not address fuel conversation as a talking point. Our modern way of life with heat, lights, and electronic devices demands a great deal of fuel for it to work. Conservation recognizes we cannot have it all today and somehow expect it is going to be there tomorrow. With a world population now over 7 billion people the topic of conservation is not going away any time soon.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus addresses what conserving means not for the present life, but the future glory of entering into His kingdom. The parable of the Ten Virgins was part of Jesus’ response to the disciples. They asked Him during Holy Week, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” (Matthew 24:3). Rather than concerns that have come from the industrial revolution or about modern day living, Jesus raises an alarm relevant for all times and peoples. The eternal joy of His kingdom is coming like a bridegroom to his bride. “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” Gladness to enter the wedding feast means Jesus has sustained you by the grace He gives.

Everyone was glad at first to greet the bridegroom. The ten virgins going off to meet him was an established custom. In Jesus time, when the wedding day drew near the bridegroom would come to meet his bride. He could show up at any time be it morning, noon, or night. The ten virgins were like bridesmaids helping the bride be ready for his arrival. Of course, the bridegroom in the parable is Jesus. The virgins would be those who belong to the Church on earth. All were pure for baptism into the Name of Jesus granted this blessing. As St. Paul says, “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). The Gospel invites all to share in the enteral joy of the bridegroom. By His sacrifice, Jesus has made the baptized ready to greet Him.

However, Jesus set apart one distinction in this parable. “Five of (the virgins) were foolish, and five were wise.” They all took lamps in case of a delay by the bridegroom, but here was the difference. The wise took more than enough oil. These virgins are those in Christ living by faith from the promise of their baptism. They put to death the Old Adam daily by repentance and live before God as a saint with righteousness that alone comes from Jesus. On the other hand, the foolish took only the bare minimum needed for their lamps. The outcome is not that shocking. They ran out of oil. These virgins are unbelievers caught up in this world. They know about Jesus kind of like any other information. Baptism into His Name is about the past rather than affecting life at the present. They might even want to join the wedding feast on the Last Day, are denied at the door. The problem is, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

There is a surprise in the parable. The delay of the bridegroom ended up snuffing out the gladness of these virgins. Even the ones prepared could not stand on their own two feet. “They ALL became drowsy and slept.” This reminds us of the disciples in Gethsemane who could not stay awake to pray. Jesus told Peter, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt 26:40-41). False idols and securities in this world dull the spiritual sense of the baptized. Likewise, whatever strength a person does in good works finally must face the crushing blow that is the sleep of death. None of the virgins seemed prepared when the cry came out, “Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.” Neither the wise nor foolish had a self-sustaining glory that would last. They all neglected the arrival of the bridegroom.

The danger we face in much of Christianity today is excitement as the answer. If we just get everyone revved up and fired up, somehow we think it is going to last. Our culture rides on the same currents like the gold rush, the oil boom, and the next best thing to sell to consumers. The towns that had the rushes and booms are no more and what we buy today does not last for tomorrow. Excitement built on our strength and glory is sure to be snuffed out. At the same time, all those virgins in the parable had a right to be excited about the coming of the bridegroom. What appears to be a delay as the days get darker is God testing the baptized not to stand on their own two feet. We have this reminder, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Only the wise virgins were glad to find oil enough for their lamps. The foolish virgins went through the motions not taking seriously the value of oil. Only the wise woke up to find light that would last for them. Luther describes it this way, “Remember, then, in this Gospel that the lamps without oil signify a mere external thing and a bodily exercise without faith in the heart; but the lamps with oil are the internal riches, ~~also~~ the external works with true faith” (Kreztmann 139). As with Noah on the ark, so God shuts the door at this wedding feast. Those wise in faith have the light to enter by His grace, while all others face the shame of their own foolishness. What is this oil? Nothing less than what God supplies as His gift in the Gospel to create and sustain all the saints in the one true faith. As the Psalmist proclaims, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalms 119:105).  
 What Jesus gave by His sacrifice and Word from the cross is still good for us today. God is generous with the oil of life that comes from His Spirit. Your lamps will not run out because Christ comes to fill them. His Word is a shield that comes to speak forgiveness and shine with hope when all other lights go out. His life comes to restore your life daily by baptism promising the Devil and darkness do not have the last say. His coming at the Lord’s Supper invites you to the wedding feast that has no end in heaven. No matter how weak and empty our faith may be, Jesus can fill us with good things that will last. All this from His Holy Word and Sacrament; oil enough for us to deal with the end of a day, to face the end of life, and to be the answer at the end of the world. “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” Gladness to enter the wedding feast means Jesus has sustained you by the grace He gives. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.