**The Bridegroom Comes at Night**

Based on [Matthew 25:1-10](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt25.1-10)

Preached on November 22, 2020

The Last Sunday of the Church Year

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

After a certain age, we no longer are growing up but begin to grow old. When that happens we notice a deterioration...hair loss, aches and pains, other chronic health problems. Some see these as things to ignore, or try to overcome. Wisdom, however sees them as signs of one’s own mortality.

The world has the same type of life-cycle. It is beginning to show signs of deterioration. The foolish look upon these signs as mere speedbumps on the road to the world’s future perfection. But the wise know that these are signs of the world’s mortality. And just as the wise find peace in preparing for their own death through faith in Christ...so too are the faithful wise in preparing for the death of the world.

It is the Last Sunday of the Church Year, and the gospel reading appointed is the sobering parable of the ten virgins. One of the clear lessons from this parable is to stay awake, be alert, vigilant, but also be prepared; have a reserve of faith ready for when that fails. Don’t be caught off your guard when Jesus, the bridegroom comes. If he comes and you are not prepared, you will miss the final roll call to the wedding feast. And when you’re out, you’re out. The door is closed and he will not open it again.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news that nobody is so lost that they cannot be found by him. No sin is so bad that it cannot be forgiven. Our God is a gracious God. A God of second chances, seventy seven chances. These are not chances to work your own way into heaven, but chances to return to God in sackcloth and ashes, and be invited to the head of the table. Jesus assures us, “ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find;...knock and it shall be opened to you.”

But the foolish virgins approached and the door was shut, and would not be allowed in. Maybe they failed to knock. In any case, the bridegroom hears their pleadings for entrance and he is clear...knocking will do no good, he doesn’t know them. No second chance to trim their wicks, or to find an extra flask of oil. No “do overs”. The final trumpet, the cry of the bridegroom is not a rehearsal. Today, and every day we live in the knowledge of the coming of the lord of glory. Every day is a rehearsal...through baptism a “dress rehearsal” a practice of putting on Christ through faith for meeting him on that last and fateful day. Those who don’t live their days this way, though they confess Christ with their lips, do not believe Him in their hearts. They do not have the faith Christ requires, the extra flask of oil that will prove essential to meeting him.

It is only a little later in Matthew that Jesus and his disciples leave the Passover Supper to go to the Mount of Olives to pray. Jesus prays awake. He knows what’s to come...a cross and the full wrath of his Father. If you knew an excruciating death was coming would you want to think about it? I’d probably want to repress the thought. Thinking about it won’t make it come any sooner or put it off any later. There are people who won’t go to the doctor because they fear they’ll hear a bad diagnosis, cancer or something else. Ignorance is bliss. The disciples understand this; so they sleep while Jesus prays and sweats blood.

But ignorance is not bliss when it comes to the end of the world. In fact, it is the ignorant;--those who continue to marry and be given in marriage, who eat and drink and think that God is far away from them in both space and time of arrival--who will be caught unprepared in the day of the Lord. They think that the world needs to solve its own problems before God will visit. But the bridegroom will not return in the daytime, but in the darkness of night.

In bible times, people were expected a certain amount of time to visibly grieve the death of someone. Now, funerals are replaced with “celebrations of life” to help avoid the unhappy business of publicly grieving over a real loss. But time to grieve was, understood to be not only proper but necessary. People were prepared to deal with grief because they did not sleep through it. It was necessary to experience grief, “awake” as it were, and sober. But today it is as if we hurry to bury the dead before they are in the ground, but there’s a price for procrastinating our grief.

And there's a price when we procrastinate in putting off our grief for the death of this world. We are called to the kingdom of Christ, not on the day he returns, but this day. We are called to die to the world and live in him today. We grow in faith, not when we put off thinking about our death, but when we do think about it. So too, we grow in faith when we ponder the fact that this world too is sinful and unclean and it too will die someday. Through faith, we know that this world is progressing alright, but not like the optimists think. We are progressing like Babel, upward towards godhood but away from God. But it will not achieve its goal; Christ will come again.

The news of the world--COVID numbers, elections, riots, the latest updates and prognostications--it is exhausting to behold. But we ought to behold it, as even we behold our own mortality. When pestilences and famines, political bickerings and natural disasters occur and even increase, we are to look at them..not in panic, but in faith remembering that these things are supposed to take place. The world will not win it’s battle against sin. Only Christ can redeem. And in the midst of the chaos, we are equipped to lead quiet and peaceful lives, because we have a redeemer who has come before us and who will come again to save us.

In the last days there will be much darkness and chaos over the face of the earth. God promises to send a strong delusion upon those who refuse to believe the truth. All will grow weary and sleep, but only five virgins are wise to bring an extra flask of oil. The rest go to sleep without such a supply. Many are waiting for a vaccine, or stricter mandates or something to be a sign that our salvation is nigh. But faith knows that COVID is itself the sign of our coming salvation. Confused elections and political theater are marks of a world that is not beginning to grow up to maturity, but has about run its course and is coming to an end. Don’t put hope in a day when the world solves its problems. It will not. The bridegroom will not come in the daytime, but in the night.

25 “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26 people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”