

THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
NOVEMBER 8, 2020
ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *O God, Our Help in Ages Past* Setting: Paul Soulek

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #733 *O God, Our Help in Ages Past*

- 1 O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home:
- 2 Under the shadow of Thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is Thine arm alone,
And our defense is sure.
- 3 Before the hills in order stood
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting Thou art God,
To endless years the same.
- 4 A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone,
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.
- 5 Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Soon bears us all away;
We fly forgotten as a dream
Dies at the op'ning day.
- 6 O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while troubles last
And our eternal home!

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

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

Amen.

Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?
But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.

Since we are gathered to hear God's Word, and call upon Him in prayer and praise, and let us first consider our unworthiness and confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. Together as His people let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

(Silence for reflection and self-examination)

Almighty God, have mercy upon us, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.

Almighty God, merciful Father, in Holy Baptism You declared us to be Your children and gathered us into Your one, holy Church, in which You daily and richly forgive us our sins and grant us new life through Your Spirit. Be in our midst, enliven our faith, and graciously receive our prayer and praise; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

KYRIE

In peace, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

For the gift of divine peace and of pardon, with all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort and defend us, gracious Lord:

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

1 To God on high be glory

And peace to all the earth;

Goodwill from God in heaven

Proclaimed at Jesus' birth!

We praise and bless You, Father;

Your holy name, we sing—

Our thanks for Your great glory,

Lord God, our heav'nly King.

2 To You, O sole-begotten,

The Father's Son, we pray;

O Lamb of God, our Savior,

You take our sins away.

Have mercy on us, Jesus;

Receive our heartfelt cry,

Where You in pow'r are seated

At God's right hand on high—

**3 For You alone are holy;
You only are the Lord.
Forever and forever,
Be worshiped and adored;
You with the Holy Spirit
Alone are Lord Most High,
In God the Father's glory.
"Amen!" our glad reply.**

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father,

send forth Your Son to lead home His bride, the Church, that with all the company of the redeemed we may finally enter into His eternal wedding feast; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



FIRST LESSON Amos 5:18–24

Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!
Why would you have the day of the LORD?
It is darkness, and not light,
as if a man fled from a lion,
and a bear met him,
or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall,
and a serpent bit him.
Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it?
"I hate, I despise your feasts,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,
I will not look upon them.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 70

Make haste, O God, to deliver me!
O LORD, make haste to help me!
Let them be put to shame and confusion
who seek my life!

Let them be turned back and brought to dishonor
who desire my hurt!
Let them turn back because of their shame
who say, "Aha, Aha!"
May all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you!
May those who love your salvation
say evermore, "God is great!"
But I am poor and needy;
hasten to me, O God!
You are my help and my deliverer;
O LORD, do not delay!

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

SECOND LESSON 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

ALLELUIA VERSE

**Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.
These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**

GOSPEL Matthew 25:1–13

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 25th chapter.

Glory to You, O Lord.

[Jesus said:] "The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 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.’ 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. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

SERMON

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ:

Today is the first of three Sundays counting down the end of the church year. During these Sundays we will think about Christ’s promised return and our need to be prepared for it. We will do so this year using Christ’s teachings from Matthew 25.

Today is also the first of three Sundays dedicated to our annual stewardship emphasis at St. Paul’s. This emphasis calls us to think about our management of God’s gifts and how we best use them to his glory.

As we’ve discovered over the years, the combining of these two emphases works very well – for both encourage us to prepare, make decisions and take action.

To guide our consideration this year, we will do so under the theme: **“a time to be wise; a time to be bold.”** The theme comes from the readings, as you will clearly see.

Today’s reading, from the first section of Matthew 25, calls us to be wise. In these verses, Jesus tells a parable about ten young women who are waiting to join a procession to the site of a wedding. Since the procession takes place during night, the women must have their lamps ready. The procession, led by the bridegroom, could come at any time. And it won’t wait.

As the parable unfolds, we hear that five of the women are wise and five are foolish. And we hear why.

The ones who are wise are the ones who are prepared. They have enough oil for their lamps. The ones who are foolish are the ones not prepared. They didn’t bring enough oil.

Being wise means being prepared. That’s the main point of this parable. Straight and simple.

But having determined this, we are now led to address two important questions.

The first question is: why should I be prepared? What’s at stake?

When I go backpacking in the mountains, I always take an extra fuel canister for my little stove. What’s at stake is having a warm meal at night and a warm cup of coffee in the morning. Those sources of warmth are much appreciated out on the trail. But I could survive without them if I needed to.

In the parable, the experience at stake was participation in a wedding. The foolish women missed out. Very sad. But a person can survive just fine without going to a wedding, right?

Except in the parable, the wedding points to something much more critical. It signifies the great celebration of heaven, where Christ the bridegroom will be joined to his bride, the church. This is the great banquet to come which God has prepared for his people and it is not something to be missed.

In the previous chapter, Jesus went into great detail telling his disciples about his return in glory at the end of the age. Among those words he said: “Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man,

and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (24:30,31). After this description of his return, Jesus then spends the rest of the chapter urging his disciples to be ready. Today’s parable is a continuation of that urging. Knowing that there is an urgent need to be prepared is the first step.

Sadly, many people feel no urgency about being prepared in this way. Some of them fear no judgment upon their sins. Others have no desire for the joys of heaven. Others simply live in the moment without any thought about what lies ahead. Most all of them are caught up in the spirit of the age, which doubts whether we can really know anything for sure.

We, however, believe that God’s words to us in the scriptures are true. And because of this, we know that God has created us to live beyond the grave. And that he will take us someday to live in a world without pain and suffering. And that we will live with him – and with one another – in a place of peace and joy.

But we also know that we will need to journey through this life to get there. And that we will need to prepare for the journey.

Which leads us to the second question. The first question is understanding *why* we need to be prepared. The second is understanding *what* we need to be prepared.

In the parable, the women needed enough oil for their lamps so that they would not miss the wedding procession. The oil is the critical need. And what does it represent?

Luther said unequivocally that the oil represented faith. To him, faith alone was needed for preparation.

But many others say the oil represents good works. They will point to passages such as Matthew 5:16, where Jesus, using the same metaphor of a lamp, says: “let your light so shine before others that they may see your *good works* and glorify your Father in heaven.”

This seems to be a strong Biblical connection. Still, here the good works are the light that is seen, and not the oil which fuels the light.

St. Augustine, writing in the 5th century, makes this very distinction. He says that the burning lamps are good works, but the oil is the gift of God. He points out that oil comes from olives, which are created by God not man. And he notes that we are to carry the oil with us, which, he says, means to “have it within.”

Regarding our salvation as pictured in the parable, Augustine sees it as something prior to the lamp. He sees it in the fact that the women are virgins. “Every Christian soul has received the name of virgin,” he says. By this he is referring to the fact that we are declared pure by God, who satisfied his requirement of purity through the blood of Jesus.

Augustine ends up saying that the oil in this parable is “charity” – a word that comes from a translation of the Bible’s primary word for love. He says this not because he wants to emphasize our charitable deeds over our faith, but because he wants to include both. Augustine points to that word of St. Paul which says: “and now these three remain: faith, hope and charity, but the greatest of them is charity.” Charity, meaning love, is chosen because it is seen as a bigger word than faith – one that includes faith and works. Augustine’s word choice seems particularly apt when we go back to chapter 24 v.12 and

hear Jesus say: “because lawlessness will be increased, the *love* of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

The parable of Jesus urges us to be prepared, and we will be prepared when we have faith... faith in God’s will for us, his love for us, and his plan of salvation. Our faith will be expressed as a love for God, for we know we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

We will also be prepared as we live the faith through our love and good works toward our neighbor, for that living of the faith is an exercising of our faith which will work to keep it strong. As our brother James reminds us, faith without works is dead.

Still, even more important than exercising our faith... is feeding it. We do this as we listen to God’s Word and as we receive the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. These will keep the oil in our lamp full. These will help us be prepared for the day of judgment. These will allow us to endure throughout the journey.

Having addressed the questions of our text, we then apply our learning to the subject of our stewardship.

Certainly, this parable is told to urge us to action. Stewardship teaching does the same. Being a good steward of God’s gifts requires us to take the actions of noting his gifts, managing his gifts and using them as he would have us do. We do these things as a means of exercising our faith and as a means of thanking God for his salvation.

This week you got a letter from our congregational leaders giving you an update on recent developments at our church and asking you to participate in our stewardship efforts. The letter urges you to think about your time, talents and financial resources, and consider how these can be used for the furthering of God’s work.

As you think about these things, you will no doubt find opportunities to give toward God’s work within your own home and family as well as other organizations and efforts of our community. We would ask, however, that you also practice the Biblical teaching of giving to God’s work through your church. The church addresses the greatest need of our world – the spirit and soul of the individual person. It tells people the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ, and it helps people to live faithfully and morally.

In your stewardship you will want to be wise. The Biblical wisdom of giving is the tithe – ten percent of your earnings for God’s work outside of your own needs. The tithe can be challenging. But it will always be blessed.

Being wise may also mean looking at your budget again, and reconsidering your schedule, and re-evaluating your gifts. Sometimes we get off track. Sometimes we develop bad habits. The stewardship task calls us to think about such things.

And I will also add, when thinking about the need to be wise, that sometimes we hear that word and think it means “careful” – especially in these days of the Pandemic. There is certainly an element of risk management that wisdom calls us to consider. But as we will see next week, wisdom also calls us to be bold. We must remember that “wise” and “careful” are not synonyms. Wisdom knows which actions to take – and takes them.

Today as we think about the actions involved in being prepared for Christ to come again, we do well to also remember the actions involved in being good stewards. So, read through our congregational

letter, think and pray about your time, talents and financial resources, and take actions through your giving and your pledging. We are doing these things together. And together we will be blessed.

In the name of Jesus our Lord and our Savior. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY #516 Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying

- 1 "Wake, awake, for night is flying,"
The watchmen on the heights are crying;
 "Awake, Jerusalem, arise!"
Midnight hears the welcome voices
And at the thrilling cry rejoices:
 "Oh, where are ye, ye virgins wise?
The Bridegroom comes, awake!
Your lamps with gladness take!
 Alleluia!
With bridal care
Yourselves prepare
To meet the Bridegroom, who is near."**
- 2 Zion hears the watchmen singing,
And all her heart with joy is springing;
 She wakes, she rises from her gloom.
For her Lord comes down all-glorious,
The strong in grace, in truth victorious;
 Her star is ris'n, her light is come.
Now come, Thou Blessèd One,
Lord Jesus, God's own Son,
 Hail! Hosanna!
We enter all
The wedding hall
To eat the Supper at Thy call.**
- 3 Now let all the heav'ns adore Thee,
Let saints and angels sing before Thee
 With harp and cymbals' clearest tone.
Of one pearl each shining portal,
Where, joining with the choir immortal,
 We gather round Thy radiant throne.
No eye has seen the light,
No ear has heard the might
 Of Thy glory;
Therefore will we
Eternally
Sing hymns of praise and joy to Thee!**

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERING **Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying** Setting: Jeffrey Blersch

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Let us pray to the Lord God, our help and deliverer, that we may be granted all things good and needful and guarded against all things evil and harmful.

Brief silence

That the Lord would rule over the darkness and shine His light over all the earth, that those from many nations may be united as one people through Baptism and live together in faith, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Lord would grant us wisdom and courage, that we may be prepared at all times to receive Him when He comes in His glory and that we may not be distracted by earthly glories that fade away or disillusioned by earthly disappointments, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Lord would give courage to all pastors as they preach and teach His Word, that all those who hear may believe, and that believing they may live in righteousness and godliness before the world and be kept to the day when Christ returns, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Lord would lead us to be good stewards of all that he places in our hands, that we may wisely give to the needs of body, soul and spirit in our homes, our church and our community, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the governments of the world and our leaders would act justly and with mercy, that we may be spared war and violence, and that we may use wisely and for the Lord's glory His gift of liberty and the abundant blessings He has poured out on our land, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Lord would give aid and comfort to the sick, the suffering, the lonely and all those in need, especially those we name in our hearts at this time..., that He may grant healing according to His will and strength to bear up under the weight of affliction, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That we may not grieve as those who have no hope, that we may rejoice in the promise of the resurrection to life everlasting, and that we may encourage one another with these words from God as we mourn the death of those we love, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That we may find a home within the house of the Lord here on earth, that we may rejoice in the Lord's Word and Sacraments by which we are brought to faith and nurtured in faith, and that we may be

sustained in the days of waiting, serving the Lord in anticipation of His return, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Gracious Lord and Savior, hear our prayers and grant us contentment with your answers, that we may trust in your Fatherly will and wisdom to grant us all that we need and all that will profit our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless us and keep us.
The Lord make His face shine on us
and be gracious to us.
The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

SENDING HYMN #515 Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers

- 1 Rejoice, rejoice, believers,
And let your lights appear;
The evening is advancing,
And darker night is near.
The Bridegroom is arising
And soon is drawing nigh.
Up, pray and watch and wrestle;
At midnight comes the cry.**
- 2 The watchers on the mountain
Proclaim the Bridegroom near;
Go forth as He approaches
With alleluias clear.
The marriage feast is waiting;
The gates wide open stand.
Arise, O heirs of glory;
The Bridegroom is at hand.**

- 3 The saints, who here in patience
Their cross and suff'rings bore,
Shall live and reign forever
When sorrow is no more.
Around the throne of glory
The Lamb they shall behold;
In triumph cast before Him
Their diadems of gold.
- 4 Our hope and expectation,
O Jesus, now appear;
Arise, O Sun so longed for,
O'er this benighted sphere.
With hearts and hands uplifted,
We plead, O Lord, to see
The day of earth's redemption
That sets Your people free!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE *Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers* Setting: Donald Rotermund

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