Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

By the Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, Founder of Crossways International

(Sola Publishing, Edited Version © 2023 H. Wendt)

Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering: **Matthew 25:1-13**

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book): Year A - Proper 27, Text: Matthew 25:1-13
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary): Year A - Proper 27, Text: Matthew 25:1-13

Verse 25:1: This parable is unique to Matthew (though there is a comparable teaching in Luke 12:35–38). This parable presents the final revealing of the Kingdom in terms of wedding customs (cf. 9:15; 11:17; 22:1–14; 24:38).

The ten maidens are the bride's attendants. The bridegroom would come with his companions to take the bride from her parents' home to his own home. When he approached, the maidens would go out with lighted lamps to meet him and his friends.

Verses 25:2–4: Five of the maidens were foolish, and five were wise. The foolish had lamps but apparently took no extra oil with them. The wise did take extra oil with them.

Verses 25:5–6: For some reason, the bridegroom was delayed so long that finally all ten maidens fell asleep. Suddenly at midnight (rather late!), all maidens heard a cry and awoke. "The bridegroom! Come out to meet him!"

Verses 25:7–9: Although all ten maidens trimmed the wicks of their lamps, the foolish realized that their lamps were flickering or out and pleaded with the wise to give them some of the additional oil that they had brought with them. However, the wise refused to do any sharing and haughtily advised the foolish (at midnight!), "Go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." Apparently, the foolish maidens ran off to make their purchases.

Verse 25:10: While the foolish maidens were doing this, the celebrations got under way. Those maidens who were prepared went in with the groom to the marriage feast and the door was shut.

Verses 25:11–12: The foolish maidens eventually returned and cried out, "Lord, Lord, open to us!" The groom responded in a severe manner, "I do not know you!"

It is not exactly helpful to interpret each detail of this parable in an allegorical manner — even though it would be easy to equate the bridegroom with Jesus, the delay with the tardiness of the Second Coming, the five wise maidens with the Christian community, and the exclusion of the five foolish maidens with the eternal punishment of unbelievers.

Those who do this should then also ask what the lamps and the oil and the dealers signify. As it stands, the parable is a story of a wedding told in a bold and stylized fashion, realistic except for a few details (shopping at midnight and the bridegroom's refusal to open the door).

Verse 25:13: The parable has been supplied with an unadorned conclusion. The leaders and ordinary members of the community know neither the day nor the hour (see also 24:36, 42, 50). Therefore they are urged to demonstrate watchfulness (v. 24:12), here defined as a form of wisdom (verses 2–9) and readiness (verse 10).

Although many refer to the central message of this parable as "Be prepared!" we shall refer to it as "Live expectantly!" and the message of the two parables that follow as "Live responsibly!" (25:14–30) and "Live compassionately!" (25:31–46).

Made available at: www.crossways.org and www.solapublishing.com. Permission is granted to reproduce for local use.