Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 27) – November 8, 2026

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.

- Matthew 25:10-13 -

Because the bridegroom is delayed in coming, they need extra oil for their lamps. The wise virgins brought extra oil, but the foolish virgins did not. Thus, when the bridegroom comes, the foolish virgins must go out in search of oil. As a result, they miss the procession and are shut out of the feast. So, it initially seems that the wise virgins are saved by their good works while the foolish virgins are damned for their carelessness.

However, the symbolism of this parable supports a gospel emphasis. The bridegroom is Jesus the Messiah. The wedding feast is The Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The lighted lamps represent saving faith that shines forth in words and deeds. Finally, the oil represents the work of the Holy Spirit in creating and sustaining this saving faith. Thus, the wise virgins are saved by their faith in Christ while the foolish virgins are damned by their unbelief.

This interpretation is clinched by the words of the Lord to the foolish virgins, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you." This doesn't mean that the Lord did not know who they were. It means that he did not know them in a saving relational way. So, the message of the parable is to believe the gospel and trust in the work of Christ before it is too late. This is gospel proclamation, not works-righteousness.

Another emphasis of the parable is that the coming of Christ will be surprising and uncertain. Go back and read Matthew 24. In Matthew 24 Jesus' disciples think that the destruction of the Temple and the end of the history will be one and the same event. In response Jesus says that the destruction of the Temple will occur within their own generation and will be preceded by signs. By contrast, the second coming will not be preceded by signs and will therefore catch people by surprise. This is a good antidote to both end time speculation and spiritual sloth.

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