

## Matthew 25:1-13

Saints Triumphant; November 19 & 20, 2017

**“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”** (Heb. 11:1)

*“I don't blame the Lord,” she said. “I will always have my faith. But I won't go to that church no more. I'm scared. From here on, I am going to study at home. I don't know what to think anymore. This world is full of so much anger.”* (NBC news) Those were the words spoken by Rosanne Solis, one of the survivors the shooting at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs two weeks ago. 26 souls did not know that their faith would come to an end in church that day.

They no longer had to look forward to heaven with hope. On that day, they met the Lord in person. On that day, they saw the importance of their faith in Jesus. **“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”** This morning, as we celebrate what is known in the Christian Church as *“Saints Triumphant”* Sunday, Jesus reminds us how important our faith is as we look forward to the day that we will be *Saints Triumphant* in heaven.

He uses this parable about a wedding to teach us about the importance of our faith being ready for Jesus' return or to the day that we go to heaven. That begs the question: *How do we keep the lamp of faith lit? How do we know that we are ready?*

In order to understand the parable, we need to understand that the weddings in Jesus' day were much different than the weddings of today. Today – the bride and groom will make their promises and begin their new life together as husband and wife on the same day. In Jesus' day, there are two events that happen. They would make their promises to each other. They would then separate so that the husband could get his home ready to welcome his new bride and to celebrate their marriage. There could be months between those two events.

When he would have everything ready, he would then return to his bride and bring her to his home for the wedding celebration. It would be the job of the bridesmaids, or the virgins in our text, to wait with the bride until the groom arrived. When the cry went out that he was approaching, they went into the streets to meet him. They led him to the bride's house where she was waiting. Finally, they accompanied the happy couple from the bride's house to the groom's house where the wedding celebration took place. All the while, each bridesmaid held a lamp suspended from a pole to light the way.

Who are the different people in the parable? The groom was Christ; the bride is the Christian Church; the bridesmaids or virgins were the believers in Christ. At this wedding, all ten looked prepared. From the outside, you wouldn't be able to tell the difference. They all were invited. They were all waiting for the groom. They were all dressed. They all had their lamps. Yet, Jesus says that: **“Five of them were foolish and five were wise.”** The Greek word used for **“foolish”** is the word from which we get the English word: *“Morons.”* What made them foolish or morons?

As they waited for the groom, 5 of them took their lamps, but not their oil. They were like campers going into a dark woods with a flashlight and no batteries. Without enough oil, their lamps were worthless. You can't help but wonder, what were they thinking? What was on their mind as they waited for the groom? They had been invited by the bride and groom to join the celebration. They knew what was expected from them. Why didn't they bring their oil? Jesus doesn't tell us. But there are a couple of possibilities.

Maybe, they were thinking: *“No one would notice.”* As long as the groom came when it was daylight, no one would've known the difference. They had their lamps like the others and they could blend right in. Maybe they were thinking: *“We'll take care of that later.”* Since the groom didn't come right away, they had time to get some later. Maybe they thought: *“We have connections.”* Sure, they didn't have the oil, but the others in the wedding party did. They would have some that could be shared. The excuses didn't work for them and don't work for us today.

You've heard the excuses, haven't you? *“No one will notice.”* I come to church, I sing, I pray. Yet, I willingly, deliberately, repeatedly keep doing the same sin over and over. No one will notice.

*"I'll take care of that later."* It's okay if I miss some Sundays in a row. I've got time. I've got all these things that need to get done. I have no other time in the week. I'll take care of that later.

*"I've got connections."* After all, my parents went to church, my wife goes all the time. My grandfather has gone. My second cousin is even a pastor. I can coast into heaven on someone else's coat-tails.

They didn't work for the people in Jesus' parable. When Christ returns, everyone will notice. There will be no more later. Our connections aren't really going to matter. When that cry goes out that the Bridegroom is coming, there is no more time. There is no more time to get some more oil. The words that the Bridegroom will say to those who are not ready will be chilling. *I tell you the truth, I do not know you. I don't even know who you are.* **"Truly I tell you, I don't know you."** Remember – Jesus is speaking these words not to those who are all out there, but inside here.

There are details of this parable that we may not be able to fully understand. But the main point of the parable is clear. Be wise. Be ready. Fill your lamps with the oil of God's Word and Sacraments. Put that Word to practice in your life. Sounds simple, doesn't it? Yet, am I that person? Am I that person who always put God's Word into practice? Do I always take that Word to heart? Why would God want me? I don't really feel all that ready at times.

One thing is certain – If our entrance into heaven depended one little bit on my watchfulness, then the door will be shut. The groom will say to me: **"I do not know you."** Thank God that our readiness doesn't depend on us. Instead, it depends on how watchful and ready the bridegroom Jesus was and is. He laid down his life to pay for your spiritual sluggishness. Your sins are forgiven.

If today is the day that you are called from this world, you are ready. Your Savior will take you home. You will enjoy the wedding banquet in heaven. You see, dear friends, that is the importance of your faith. **"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."** Jesus has made you ready. Amen.