“You Have to Be Prepared”

Matthew 25:1-13

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

If you don’t personally know someone like this, I can guarantee you’ve at least heard of them or seen them in a movie or TV show—the “Prepper.” Webster’s dictionary defines the term as “a person who prepares something or prepares for something; specifically, a person who gathers materials and makes plans in preparation for surviving a major disaster or cataclysm.” Preppers always try to have everything they need to cover every possible contingency. They plan, stack, hoard, and fill their bug out bags so that when it’s time for action, there’s no need to panic or delay. When it finally goes down, those are the people you want to be your friends. Because if you ask for help, you want the answer to be, “Yes.” And, if you ask them why they go through all this trouble, their answer is simple. “You have to be prepared.”

In our text this morning we have two different types of virgins that Jesus describes. The five preppers, and the five that just fly by the seat of their pants. The first five were foolish and brought no extra oil believing that the bridegroom would arrive at any moment. The other five came prepared, ready with flasks of oil should the bridegroom arrive later than expected. And that is precisely what happens. The virgins fall asleep as the bridegroom was delayed, and their lamps burned in anticipation of his coming. Finally at midnight there was the cry that he was here! All ten rose, and the five preppers trimmed their lamps, adding oil so they could meet the bridegroom as he arrived. The foolish five beg the others for some oil for their lamps, but there is not enough for both groups, and they tell them to go and find their own. When they return from their journey to find more oil, they come back to find the gate shut, and an answer of, “Truly, truly, I do not know you.”

Jesus speaking in parables can often be a quandary. This one, most would say is pretty obvious. Don’t share what the Lord has given you, because then you won’t be prepared when He comes for the wedding feast. Keep it all for yourself and let everyone else worry about their own. Many false teachers would present this parable in such a way. It’s all about you and your faith with God, and you don’t need to worry about what others are doing. Boy does your sinful flesh love for this to be taught in that way. Interpreting the Lord’s words in a way that makes it all about you is the greatest news your Old Adam has ever heard. He gets his ego boosted and finally gets his shining place on the stage: spotlights, prominent music, feature dancing, and first one listed on the end

credits. Because when it's all about you and how much work you do to be prepared, it isn't about the real reason those virgins were ready for the coming of the bridegroom.

The real reason they were prepared and the others weren't had nothing to do with their mathematical calculations of how much oil to bring. It had nothing to do with the fact that they had done enough work to go out and collect it and put it in the flasks. On the other hand, the lack of preparedness on the part of the other five was entirely their doing. These five are representative of what we might call the "half-believer." They are the ones that continually have one foot in the boat of the world and one foot in the boat of the Church. But those two boats are so divergent, even the most flexible gymnast can't do that kind of split to keep a leg in each one. Keeping a foot in the world's boat ultimately pulls you away from where you should be when the marriage feast begins.

And once the bridegroom arrives, it is too late. You can't go out and prepare for His coming after He has come. This parable is where we get our understanding that once Christ comes, there is no more opportunity to come to faith. You either have the oil in your lamp, meaning you have faith in Christ which is yours by the inworking of the Holy Spirit, or you have nothing but sin and the wages of that sin, which is death. That death is an eternal one. It is a final judgment that they are condemned for their decision to reject faith in the Almighty God. They don't even bother looking for Him to come, because they are so enamored with their life in the sinful flesh that they cannot comprehend the possibility that they are destined for everlasting separation from God, in the place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Even for those who are in the faith, it's very easy to become complacent and forget the reality that Christ is indeed coming again. Many sheep have wandered away from the flock because they look at the state of the world today and throughout the last two thousand years and they just give up all hope that the Lord is going to come. You must keep your lamps trimmed, ready for the coming of the Bridegroom to inaugurate His unending feast in His heavenly banquet hall. That sounds an awful lot like you have work to do, but that is not what it means to keep your lamps trimmed and be prepared for His coming. You are not capable of doing such preparation, so thanks be to God that your hope does not lie in how well you are able to prepare yourself.

Jesus has done all the preparatory work for you. He has done the work of salvation by going to the cross to buy you back from the slavery of sin, death, and the devil. Not only has He made you ready for His coming by the work of the Spirit bringing you faith in Him, He has gone to His Father's house to prepare a place for you. Christ has gone to prepare your heavenly home, the place of your true citizenship. You don't

have to hope that He is preparing a place for you, or that He is coming. He hasn't simply stated it in parables, but clearly and directly to His disciples in the upper room, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also (John 14:3)." By the preparation of faith, you have the hope of everlasting life in the presence of your heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Not an ambiguous existence in some far-off land, but side by side with your Savior—the object of your faith in this life—who loves you and gave Himself up for you.

By His death and resurrection, all those with faith in Him will share in the glory that awaits, and it is a glory beyond all comprehension. Despite the troubles of this life that are caused by your sinful flesh, there is nothing but pure inexorable joy in your future. As Paul says in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." It is impossible for your sinful human mind to understand what that glory will be like, and so your loving God in His grace has given you a "sneak peek" of what you can expect in the life to come. He has done so by giving you forgiveness, life, and salvation in His means of grace. In the Word and Sacraments, you see the truth of what awaits.

By His Holy Word, He has revealed to you that you are His own dear child. In the waters of your baptisms, He cemented that identity within you by giving you His Holy Spirit and making you the dwelling place of His Son by faith. In the Lord's Supper, He gives you forgiveness through the reception of His very body and blood. Each one of those means is given as the assurance of your salvation. John says in his first Epistle, "This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ--; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree." Christ is coming again on the clouds of heaven to judge the earth, but He comes to us even now in the Spirit, the water, and the blood. In His revealed Word, as the Word Himself, He comes to you and edifies you in the knowledge of Him. By the water of baptism, He gives faith to the faithless, and marks you as His own. And through the foretaste of the marriage feast in the true body and blood He which He sacrificed for you upon the cross, you are made ready—you are prepared—for the day of His coming. This meal sustains you until the day you partake of the marriage feast to which you have been invited—the marriage feast of Christ's Bride, the Church, and the Lamb in His Kingdom that has no end.

Christ's return will come at a time when no one expects Him, for as He says in the close of the parable, "you know neither the day nor the hour." But the one truth that stands as certain beyond all doubt is that He will indeed come. Jesus says to John at the

close of His revelation to the Apostle, “Surely I am coming soon,” to which the Apostle responds joyfully, “Amen. Come Lord Jesus!” The answer to how to be prepared for that day does not lie within you and your own power to prepare yourself. You don’t have to work on your faith and make sure your faith is as sincere as possible. You are already prepared with flasks of oil for the coming of the Bridegroom. He Himself has prepared you for that day, because it is His work upon the cross, the benefit of which has been imparted to you by the Holy Spirit, that has made you ready for the coming of the day of your salvation.

It is not something that you have to look forward to Him doing for you; it is already done. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “For [God] says, ‘In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” The five prepared virgins were ready well before the expectation of the bridegroom, for their flasks of oil had already been filled and their lamps trimmed by faith. You stand prepared already, not because of your greatness and your good works, but because Christ has bought you back from the power of sin, death, and the devil by His blood. You have already been welcomed into the marriage feast, and as one who is in the faith of Your Lord Jesus Christ, you have received your inheritance, and you will be present for the great feast of the Lamb in His kingdom. You will finally come into that “Sweet and blessed Country,” to dwell in the peace and glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in everlasting bliss forevermore. Amen.