

“Exiles, Children and Bridesmaids – All Need The Lord”

Proper 27-A November 9, 2008

Matthew 25:1-13

Introduction:

Our lessons today are varied, and at first blush might not seem to have a central connection.

In Joshua we read about Joshua calling the people to make a firm commitment to the Lord and give up the ‘other’ gods to which they have attached themselves.

In Psalm 78, there is a prophecy about Jesus teaching in parables – *“the mysteries of ancient times”*; and in verses 5ff, God commands us to teach the faith to our children – *“that the generations to come might know”* – so that children *“might put their trust in God, and not forget the deeds of God, but keep his commandments”*.

In 1 Thessalonians 4, St. Paul describes the Rapture when the church is *“caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air ...”*.

In our Gospel lesson Jesus tells a parable about Ten Bridesmaids – five who were foolish and five who were wise. Jesus ends the teaching with a strong warning that connects to the message of the rapture read in Paul’s letter: *“Keep awake .. for you do not know the day or the hour”* when the Lord will return.

To make all the connections and learn God’s lesson for us today lets turn to

The Parable of The Ten Bridesmaids, or The Ten Virgins.

Listen again to the first paragraph of Jesus' teaching regarding what will occur just before the Rapture. From the New Century Version: ¹*"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to wait for the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³The five foolish bridesmaids took their lamps, but they did not take more oil for the lamps to burn. ⁴The wise bridesmaids took their lamps and more oil in jars. ⁵Because the bridegroom was late, they became sleepy and went to sleep.*

In the marriage metaphor for the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus is always the Bridegroom and the church – the true believers in Christ - is always the Bride. In today's parable Jesus says there are ten bridesmaids –they represent the church. Some are wise. Some are foolish. Each has a lamp that represents the human spirit – the potential of the light of God was in each of their souls. I believe no human being is born without the potential to be illuminated by God's light. I believe that is true for even the most severely brain damaged persons. God's light can shine in everyone! Every human has a spirit that God can connect with.

Jesus says people are wise when they make sure

they have oil to make their lights – their spirits - shine, and extra oil. In the Old Testament oil was a symbol for the presence of the Holy Spirit. It takes God's Spirit to really make our lights shine brightly. Without God in our lives our spirits can shine for a while but not like they can when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says people are foolish when they try to go through life careless about drawing extra oil – extra illumination – from God's Holy Spirit. To make the point more powerful there are always people in church who are foolish bridesmaids.

These are people who dutifully come to church services, but over time have become tired because Jesus has taken so long in returning. It's as if we have lain down to take a nap. We've lost our fervor for being ready for the Lord's return. We come to church because we recognize it meets a spiritual need in our lives. However, we never allow ourselves to acquire all the oil – all the spiritual relationship - God is offering. Maybe it's out of laziness, or a sense of self-sufficiency, or deep doubt that hides our faith. At any rate, we want to go to heaven because who would want to go to Hell. So, going to church is a kind of 'covering my bets' endeavor. It is careless. We somehow think that just being on the roll of a church is all that God requires for living with

Jesus in eternity. That's leaving too much to chance, isn't it?

There is no power in that kind of Christianity. We have no motivation to burn brightly for Christ – to do all we can to grow into the mature person God designed us to be – to do everything within our ability to assist someone else to meet Jesus and also enter God's forever family. That kind of Christianity makes us foolish bridesmaids and the danger is to be locked out of heaven with Jesus saying he never knew us.

The Wise Bridesmaids, on-the-other hand, had their lamps trimmed and had extra oil. They didn't know when the Bridegroom would appear. They didn't know how long they might have to keep their lamps lit. All they knew is they loved the Bridegroom, and whenever he came for them they wanted to be ready. So,

How Does This Speak To Us Today?

If you accept the point of view that God really is behind Scripture then it is not far-fetched to believe that Jesus really knew what He was talking about, and it was recorded accurately because the Holy Spirit has faithfully been watching over the writing and publication of the Bible. Therefore, this story has a lesson for us.

Will we be wise or foolish bridesmaids? Will we fight against spiritual drowsiness? Will we accept

responsibility to keep ourselves spiritually vital – full of God? Will we worship God in Spirit and Truth, feed on God’s Holy Word through reading and studying the Bible, and faithfully participate in God’s sacraments, thus keeping ourselves healthy and strong? Will we do everything in our power, as God directs us, to share this good news with others? Will we commit ourselves to serve others in Christ’s name, realizing that when we do we are serving the Lord Himself?

For instance, will we commit ourselves to 15 minutes of prayer each Sunday of Advent, seeking God’s will for Holy Cross Church? If we do these kinds of things we are wise bridesmaids. We will be ready when Jesus returns. We will be ushered into that great heavenly banquet with bridesmaids from all generations and we will hear our Lord say, “Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into your eternal reward.”

Like Moses said to Israel during the Exodus: Today I set before you two paths. One leads to disobedience and destruction. The other leads to obedience and life. Therefore, choose life!