

26th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 25:1-13

Have you ever gotten into the car, driven to work, turned off the engine, gotten out of the car, walked into the workplace—and then realized that you had forgotten something very important at home? Or, have you ever gotten to your evening destination, only to realize that something needed was missing? (Bowling ball, workout bag, baseball, schoolbooks, spouse, children) That's why many of us feel a little uncomfortable about the rejected virgins, whom we assume were as forgetful as we are.

The virgins in Jesus' story were not forgetful. They were neglectful. They failed to place a high priority on the things that were most important. They knew that lamps without oil would not give light, but thought there would be time to take care of that later, when there weren't 'more important' things to do. In the end, they realized their folly and wanted someone else to provide what they should have taken care of themselves. Jesus points out that no one else could relive their lives for them. When the end of their time came, the virgins could not go back and change their decisions.

Of course Jesus is not speaking of just any time. He is relating a story to demonstrate the last days. The virgins in the story are unbelievers who refuse to take the time to consider Jesus or know His love in their lives.

Today, there are millions of people just like the virgins, who persist in their belief that Jesus is either not worth their time, or they plan to consider His reality later in life—when they get the chance. Unfortunately, like the virgins, life's end can come unexpectedly, before an unbeliever gets around to thinking beyond his or her own power, money, problems, and busy lives.

As Christians, we know Jesus and His gift of salvation, but it is still important to think about, and be ready for, our trip home, whenever that may come. As His children, Christians do not fear Jesus' return. It will be glorious. Our way of preparing is to love God above all else, and to love our neighbors as ourselves, inviting them to be a part of Jesus' kingdom by our very lives.

Are you asking your friends to join you in Bible study?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

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Matthew 25:1-13

1. What was the earthly setting on which Jesus' story was based? Why was an ample oil supply so important in this context?
2. Parables are earthly stories with heavenly meanings. Who is the bridegroom? Who are the virgins? When will the bridegroom come?
3. What does it mean to be "wise" at Jesus' return? What does it mean to be "foolish"? Why couldn't the "wise" share with the "foolish"?

For Family Reflection

4. Do we need oil to be ready for Jesus' return? What do we need? Who provides what we need?
5. Jesus said "Keep watch!" What are we watching for? How do we keep watch?
6. What are some foolish things that you do? How does God's grace correct our foolish errors?

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Luke 23:27-43

Jesus died on the cross. He died for our sin so that we might have life abundant and eternal, righteous in God's sight through His Son, spending eternity with Him.

Have you ever stopped to think what this really means? You and I put Jesus on the cross. Without us, He would not have had to suffer separation from His Father even for a moment. His agonized cry, "My God, My God! Why have You forsaken Me?" would not have happened. He would not have suffered the most degrading death of the ancient world. Every person ever born (or created) is responsible.

Why bring up the obvious on this, the last Sunday of the church year? This Last Sunday of the church year, 2010, is there one adult sitting with you today who was not there in 2009? If your answer is "Yes" then the Holy Spirit may be using you to make others in your community aware of Christ's love.

If your answer is "No," consider how to have that new person still on the "missing" list at your side next year, because he or she is there in your community.

Jesus' Great Commission was for each of us. Is your church open to the community? Does the community think your church is the center of the community life? Does the Light of Jesus shine into the community?

In the farming days of decades ago, the church was the community's glue; the place of special celebration, special meals; the place where farmers planned how to help their own, the place of prayer in disastrous times and of praise when crops were abundant.

We cannot make our churches the community center again by ourselves, but the Holy Spirit empowers us to help Him make it happen; to open the doors to strangers in our towns; to invite them to come in; to share a meal; to worship and learn, share the love and salvation of Jesus Christ, celebrate the sacraments, and pray God's blessings on farms, industry, and community.

Jesus willingly went to the cross to give us the free gift of salvation. He urges us to step out into sometimes uncomfortable territory to invite the unknown to "come and see," as Philip said to Nathanael.

Today ends our ten year "tour" of the weekly lessons. Throughout that time, this is the message that I hope has been taken into your hearts. Thanks for the opportunity to share with you. May God be glorified and His Kingdom expanded.

Is Bible study on your "to do" list this week?

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Luke 23:27-43

1. The compassion of Jesus is evident even in His final hours. What greater tragedy does Jesus note in vs. 28-31?
2. How could Jesus pray for forgiveness (vs. 34) for those who were crucifying Him? Who was the source of the forgiveness that was shared? What example does He give for us?
3. What Good News did Jesus have for the repentant thief? When would the blessings of paradise come to the dying thief? When do the blessings of paradise come to us?
4. The end! The text (and the verses immediately following) share the end of Jesus' earthly journey and the end of God's plan of salvation. How does the ending turn out well for us?
5. The end! It's the end of another church year. How have you seen the cross of Jesus this year? How have you grown as His disciple? With whom will you share the forgiveness given through the cross?
6. The end! After ten years of weekly Bible inserts provided by the Iowa District West Christian Education Committee, this personal Bible study resource will no longer be produced. What means will you use to stay in the Word? How will the weekly readings be explored and applied in your life?