St. Peter Lutheran Church
Last Sunday of the Church Year
Matthew 25:1-13

Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The early Christians often held vigil, reflecting their belief in the imminent return of the Lord—Easter Vigil is an example. Generations have come, and generations have gone. Kingdoms have risen and fallen. And still we wait. But **with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**

But make no mistake about it—that Day will come, like a thief in the night. So the Church watches. She remains vigilant and expectant, looking for His coming, working while it is day, proclaiming the Gospel to the ends of the earth that all would come to the knowledge of their salvation before the awful Day of the Lord comes. For that Day will be a Day of Judgment, when all will be called to give an account, both those who are living and those who are dead—we all will appear before Jesus, the righteous Judge. Some will joyfully enter the feast prepared for them from the foundation of the world. Others will find the door to the kingdom of God permanently shut to them.

But in the meantime, as our Lord tarries, the world goes on. The cares of this life overwhelm, the temptations of riches allure, the lusts of the flesh attract, and it's all but too easy to settle in to our own normal, thinking there is peace and safety when even now **the Judge is standing at the door.**

Many will begin in the faith, looking for the Lord's return only to fall asleep and forget His coming. Many will be among those who started out to meet the Bridegroom but became overwhelmed and complacent as they waited. For them, that Day will overtake them as a thief. They will not be ready when He comes. And though they will desperately desire salvation, they will find judgment and woe. They had a lamp, but its light had long ago gone out, and they took no oil with them as they waited. Their love had grown cold. They saw all the lawlessness abounding and stopped believing the promises given in Christ. They joined the mass of unbelievers who live for today and have no future hope.

And they will be surprised and caught off guard, for they knew of Christ and His salvation—they even spent time with Him, heard His teaching, and were counted among His people. These are the foolish virgins, who took no oil. **When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.'**

So these foolish ones will turn to the wise ones, saying, **"Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out."** But the wise will answer, **"No, lest there should not be enough for us and you."** On that Day each will be accountable for himself. The flame of faith of one person cannot be shared with another. There will be no time then for those without oil to go and buy for themselves. The time of God's patience will be over. Those who were ready will go in with Him to the wedding and the door will be shut. Those on the outside, though they now bow the knee and say, **"Lord, Lord, open to us!"** will receive no mercy. Jesus will answer them, **"Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you."**

But the Judge who renders this verdict is not cruel. It is not His fault that these foolish ones are cast out of the Kingdom. They had the same opportunity as the wise. Jesus' blood was shed for the sins of the

entire world. The Way to the Father through Him was open. The gifts of heaven were continually here on earth for as many as would receive them. God's Word was preached, even as it is today. Some came and some listened and believed. Others had farms and others work that demanded their attention instead. Or, they just plain saw no urgency. They didn't realize that the oil of the Holy Spirit would not last for them if they did not continue receiving its supply from God.

And again, this is no fault of God—His supply is never lacking. The Word sounds forth until the end of the age, the Christian Church will never be squashed by the lawlessness of this age, even by the gates of hell. Christ remains present with His Church, speaking His loving promises to them, giving them His body and blood to eat and drink, anointing them again and again and again by His Spirit, even until the end of the age.

The wise ones who remain in His care will have all they need at His coming. Their lamps will be burning, their faith preserved. They will have been **kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.** They will go out leaping like calves from the stall as the Sun of Righteousness rises. They are **sons of light and sons of the day.**

Even though we **know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming**, the wise will be ready, no matter when it is, even at the dead of midnight, they are ready. The foolish will be carrying on like in the days of Noah, **eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage**, carousing without care until the flood sweeps them away**,** but the wise are marked with sobriety and alertness, ever watchful for His coming.

On that Day, the wise's mourning will turn to comfort and eternal joy while the foolish's gaiety will turn to weeping and gnashing of teeth. The meek ones of this age will go in with Jesus to inherit the new heavens and a new earth where the Lord is their light. The proud will be cast into outer darkness.

Then **the righteous shall inherit the land, And dwell in it forever. Be glad and rejoice forever in what I create,** says the LORD. **For behold, I create Jerusalem as rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, in the joy of my people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying...the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,** says the LORD.

This is our hope and our joy as we await that great Day. Washed in Jesus' blood, cared for by Him here in His house, the oil of the Spirit freely supplied in Word and Sacrament, we are like the Israelites, ready for our deliverance, with our belts on our waist, our sandals on our feet, and our staff in our hand, for we have put on **the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.** Amen.