

Willow River Parish

Title: Always Awake

Scripture Reading: Matthew 25:1-13

25 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹²But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ ¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Good morning Church! The weather this past week was warm. It was very happy news for us. How have you spent the past week? It was short to do what we planned during the week. My family and I visited a Korean pastor’s home who serves the Untied Methodist Church and lives in Eau Claire, WI. I saw some people wearing short sleeve shirts in the market. Their faces looked gentle and relaxed, perhaps because of the warm weather. From mid-October, the weather began to get cold with snow, but suddenly it became warm. However, no one thinks that the current season will go back to summer, not winter, even if the weather suddenly gets warm. The order of the seasons is spring, summer, autumn, and winter. As winter approaches, the sun will set by 4 p.m., and the morning sun will come late, unlike summer. When we see that we can feel winter is approaching us. When it is dark, everyone thinks of lanterns. When our hearts are dark, we find the lamp of the Lord. I hope we will have the lamp of the Lord during this winter.

In today’s scripture reading, Jesus compares the kingdom of God to ten virgins who went out to greet the groom with lamps (1). At that time, the Jewish wedding feast began with the arrival of the bridegroom in the evening. The

bridesmaids went out to the main gate of the house in the evening to greet the groom. As it was becoming dark, they had to have lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But, it wasn't a big problem that they became drowsy and slept waiting for the groom. Because they can wake up when the groom comes. As the bridegroom was delayed, it became dark and they had to light their lamps. However, there was a problem. All of them had lamps, but five of them had plenty of oil to meet the groom and the others did not.

The ten virgins all prepared lamps and oil, but the wise five prepared enough oil because they didn't know when the groom comes, and the foolish five prepared not enough oil because they thought that the groom will come soon based on their experience and knowledge. But God is beyond our experiences and knowledge. Nobody knows His time. We sometimes tend to trust our experiences and knowledge. We woke up this morning with our eyes open as usual. But nobody can guarantee what happens tomorrow. 2020 is an example. Many expected the year 2020 to be full of good things. However, contrary to many people's expectations, Covid-19 happened and a lot of people have suffered. Like this, we cannot know when the day of God is coming, and nobody can guarantee what will happen tomorrow. So we must keep awake always as Jesus said.

Finally, at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." (6) Then, all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. (7) The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." (8) But the five wise ones decline to help their sisters, saying "there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." (9) While they went, the groom arrives and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. (10)

The lesson of this parable is simple and clear. It is verse 13: "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." In fact, our lives are not much different from the five virgins who did not prepare enough oil. We sometimes trust our knowledge and experiences. Because we woke up this morning, we think that we can wake up tomorrow as well. We often make excuses that we could not prepare oil because we were very busy. However, as we have seen in the parable, God does not allow any excuse for not preparing

oil.

For me, today's scripture calls to mind an event that happened to my family a year ago. I was a seminary student and intern-pastor at the time. It began like any other Sunday; Esther and I went to church and then relaxed at home. After dinner we drove to a shopping mall to look for a baby car seat in our neighborhood. I was behind the wheel and my wife was next to me, talking on the phone with her mother. It was all very ordinary, until we were suddenly rocked by a car accident. We were going straight at the intersection, when a car on the other side of the road suddenly turned left on an unprotected signal and we crashed. We were very shaken, and we feared for our baby's safety because she was pregnant. We were sent to the hospital, confirmed the baby still had a heartbeat, underwent hours' worth of checkups and procedures, and then we returned home after hearing that we were fine. And, we had to scrap our car.

This event made me think about a lot of different things. Before this, I thought that I would live for a long time because I'm still a young man. I never thought an accident would happen to me because the day of the accident had started out so normal. Afterwards, however, I realized that today is God's present given to me.

Beloved, we cannot guarantee what will happen tomorrow. Nobody can guarantee as well. Nobody can know when the day of the Lord is coming. Educated people, professors, doctors, and experts expect what will happen tomorrow, but they cannot know exactly what is going to happen. God is transcendent. He transcends everything in the world, including our knowledge and experiences. So, we must keep awake always. Because we cannot know when the day is coming, we must keep awake always, praying and acting with love. Now, Thanksgiving and Christmas are coming, and the end of this year is near. How will you finish this year? May we prepare our lamps with enough oil for our hearts to light this winter, we pray to God. Amen.