

**Last Sunday of the Church Year**  
**Matthew 25:1-13**  
**November 21-22, 2009**  
**Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
**Girard, Illinois**

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Ten virgins with burning lamps, one for each commandment. They are pure and undefiled, virgins arrayed in white. But all is not quite what it seems. Only five, one for each book of Moses, are wise. The other five, one for each of the vanities of man, are foolish. But how can we tell the foolish from the wise? They all look the same. They all use the same hymnal. They are all where they are supposed to be. Baptized, gathered around His Word, these ten are the Church Militant. And despite their white gowns, they all fail. All ten, wise and foolish alike, fall asleep. None is as good as she should be, none acts without selfishness. Their spirits are willing but their flesh is weak. They do not keep the watch. The midnight cry comes as a surprise. Five go in. Five are shut out.

Are we wise enough to discern the distinction? Dare we peer into the doctrine of election? If they all fell asleep why are any allowed in? None are worthy. If it is because Our Lord is gracious and forgiving, then why are other five denied? Why are they not given another chance? Does Our Lord's mercy have its limits? We had better pay attention. This is not a parable about the world. This is a parable about the Church on earth. The ten virgins with burning lamps are the Church on earth. Five of them, half, are shut out. They not only fell asleep on the watch but they brought no oil other than that first exuberance of faith, that short-lived burst of enthusiasm. When that was gone, when they gave up hope. The Lord said He did not know them. Here is the reality: they were not Christians -- despite the white robes of Baptism and confirmation, despite the trapping of lamps, despite being there with the Church, despite their strong initial emotions. They foolishly judged by their senses and decided that the delay meant either that the Lord was not coming or that they had plenty of time to prepare and they put off repentance for another day. Fools! Tonight the Lord requires your soul. Your goods will left to someone else. Do not store up treasures for yourself where moth and rust destroy.

The wise also failed. They did not keep the watch. They fell asleep and had to be awakened. But they had oil reserved. Though they failed to stay awake when He was delayed, they did not give up hope. They still believed that He would come. The cry was terrifying for they had failed, they had sinned, they were sleeping and they were caught. There was no denying it. And yet they believed that the Bridegroom was good, that He loved them, that He would accept them. That is the distinction. The wise appear fools to the world. For contrary to the evidence, despite their experience, outside of rationality, even though they know they do not deserve Jesus' love, they believe that He is Lord, that He does love them, and that He is coming back.

They way of faith is lonely and full of doubt. There are so many arguments that assail our minds and senses. The devil is the master of rhetoric. He says, **“If Jesus has not yet come, if He did not come in your father's day or your grandfather's day or your great-grandfather's day, if there is no record of His coming ever but for these fragments from 2000 years ago, which could be fantasy or a clever charade, what makes you think He would come now? We have records of the evil that men can do. That is no fantasy. Leave your garage unlocked and your neighbors will steal from you. You should look out after yourself. You need your rest. You need your things. The world has known dictators, tyrants, and sadists. Those are real. You should protect yourself. So also we know about religious phonies, judgmental hypocrites, zealots who start wars and claim their way is the only way, who use religion as power for their own ends. The Islam claims Jesus Christ as a prophet. So does the Mormons. Is that your God? Will you sit here and do nothing but pray and hope and wait for the Lord? What good are you to anyone? You are not even good to yourself. Your Lord supposedly says to love your neighbor as yourself, so love yourself already. Loosen up, have some fun. And if you want to do some good then do something for the poor, feed the hungry, fix health care. Do something. Do not sit around and believe as though that changed anything or helped anyone, and languish for a God the world forgot, a God that never was what He said He was, a God who does not keep His promises. Do not waste your time with His Word or these empty rituals.”**

O foolish sinners: repent! You've heard those lies inside your own head. You've calculated and considered. You've checked the odds. You've deliberated against God, seeking a way to have the best of both worlds. That is the way of foolishness. Repent. Be a simpleton, a fool in the eyes of the world, say, **“All I know is what the Bible says. I believe it is true. I believe in Jesus. I believe He died for me and rose again and ascended into heaven and is coming back. I believe the exact same thing the children believe. I am no smarter or more sophisticated than they. I will not panic. I will pray. I will go about my life as best I can, living in the grace He gives, asking for forgiveness, eager for the time when I will be free of doubt and fear. And if I am poor now, if I miss a few pleasures of the flesh, if I do not prosper for this foolishness, so let be it. I will wait and believe as my fathers did before me, as my children do after me, and trust my fate is the same as theirs: to be with Jesus forever.”** That is the wisdom that is born in Holy Baptism, the wisdom of children and fools, who dare to expect that God is gracious and forgiving, that His love knows no limits.

One more thing. Aesop teaches us the fable of the boy who cried wolf. The boy gets his comeuppance, what he deserves, that is the moral. *But what of the village?* The wolf was real in the end. Shall *we give up hope because of the charlatans and hypocrites who cry that the end is near only to have time march on? Or because of the evils committed falsely in Jesus' Name or the many moral failures of Christians and their preachers?* No. The village still needs to be protected. False prophets must be exposed, the people warned and prepared. Do not fall for the devil's distractions and miss the main attack. His goal is that we give up hope. If he can do that through pleasure or beauty, he will. If he can do it through violence and threat, he will. If he can do it through the intellect, he will.

The five wise virgins went in to the bridal chamber as though they never fell asleep. They sinned but they believed. That belief delivered forgiveness to them. They were accepted by the

Bridegroom. You also have sinned, but you also believe. You believe in Jesus. You love God. You want to stop sinning and to please Him. You want to be with Him. That is the faith He has given you. It saves you. It delivers forgiveness. It is wisdom. Come then, O blessed of the Father, receive food for the watch, that which strengthens the body and the soul, which restores and encourages hope: the very Body and Blood of Jesus, who loves you, who is coming back.

In ✠ Jesus' Name. Amen.