

“Listen and be wise” Mt 25:1-13

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Why are you here? Why do you listen to preaching? Why do we, pastors, preach? What is it? Is it just us, pastors, sharing our thoughts and ideas about something we have read in the Bible?

Is it just your pastor's own reflections on what is written in this ancient and sometimes difficult book? What is the point of listening to what your pastor has to say every Sunday? 'He may have his ideas, and I may have mine'. Isn't that so? 'How are his ideas better than mine?' Many think that way.

How do we think about preaching? Is it just a human activity or is there something more? If this is mere a matter of habit, or tradition then it really isn't that important. We can ignore it and do our own thing.

Sure, you may still like to listen to preaching. Some pastors may be able to say something that is rather interesting, makes us think, maybe even makes us act, but if it is only that, pastors sharing their ideas, why bother?

Or is there something more? Or maybe there is something infinitely greater than simply your pastor sharing his thoughts and ideas? What do we preach on? Hopefully we don't preach on something we read in newspapers or saw in movies, or dreamed about staring in ceiling.

Hopefully we preach on what our God speaks to us in His revelation, given to us through His chosen servants, the prophets and the apostles. Then, as we preach, it is not about our ideas or thoughts.

Instead, we preach by the command of the Lord Jesus Himself. He commissioned to teach everything that He has commanded to us. He established the vocation of pastors so that His teaching and preaching ministry can continue to the ends of the earth.

When you listen to preaching you are listening to Jesus. You are sitting at Jesus feet and He Himself is speaking to you through His messengers. When a pastor,

called and sent by the Triune God preaches, he continues the work of God. He continues the ministry of Jesus, he continues the ministry of the apostles, that is, he continues to speak the live-giving words of the Triune God, if your pastor indeed preaches what Jesus commanded.

You see, preaching is not about what I think. It is not reflections on something that I may have found amusing. Preaching is how the Triune God continues to create and sustain His Church. As you listen, you listen to Jesus.

This is, why it is so important to listen to preaching. Whenever you can. For this is how you follow Jesus, this is how you remain in His words, this is how you are made wise for salvation, this is how you receive the His Spirit.

This is how you are saved from death and devil, this is how you receive the eternal life. Simply by listening to preaching of the Word of God, simply by listening to Jesus.

The eternal Word became one of us in Jesus from Nazareth, He dwelled among us so that we could understand His message. He spoke to us in our human language. And His speaking still calls us out of this world and still brings us into God's Kingdom. He still dwells among us.

For we still hear the same words of Jesus, accompanied by the same Spirit of God. God hasn't stopped caring for His people and He hasn't stopped speaking to them, and He never will till the end of this age.

It is also true that many things that Jesus spoke were not exactly pleasant for His listeners, nor they are pleasant for us. They often are challenging. It is true also about the words from the Gospel according Matthew that we heard today.

The Kingdom of God will be like... and then Jesus tells this parable about the ten virgins. Five of them were foolish. That's not nice to call someone foolish, isn't it? And five of them were wise. Today we all want to be praised and affirmed in whatever we do, don't we?

Scholars admit that they don't know much about wedding customs in Jesus' time, and what would the role of these ten virgins be. They know that the lamps that the virgins took with them were more like torches, and you needed oil to use them. Oil was a part and parcel of the thing. No oil, no torches, no light, no entering into the wedding feast. Very simple.

Now, the five foolish virgins have not bothered to take the oil with them, and when the bridegroom finally arrived they couldn't lighten their torches and while they went to buy the oil, the feast had begun and the doors were shut.

When they came back, they couldn't get it. "Lord, lord, open to us." But the bridegroom answered, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you." Scary, harsh, unfair... how could He say that?

How did He dare to leave them out? For they really wanted to get in. And if we want something, we often assume that it must be given to us, that we are entitled, right? That's how people think today. Not so in this parable. Not so with this Jesus.

The words that the bridegroom said are very similar to what Jesus taught in the sermon on the Mount. "Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord [...]"

And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness." No one wants to hear these words, not on the Last Day, not from the mouth of the Judge Almighty.

Very harsh words. Today everyone gets a prize. Today everyone is included. Today if you think that you want to be in God's Kingdom, you must be allowed, otherwise 'you, God, better watch out, no harassing me into doing what I don't want to'.

Not so with this Jesus. There are two harsh realities that we are again reminded by this parable. First, not everyone will enter the Kingdom of God. Not everyone will feast with Jesus in everlasting joy and blessedness in these New Heavens and New Earth. Not everyone.

Not even everyone who thinks that they will be there. Many will be left out. They are called fools. And rightly so, for they just wouldn't listen to what God speaks to them, they think that they can do things their own way.

The second thing is, that it is not enough that you think that you are a Christian. As Jesus explains it elsewhere, only those who do the will of His Father will enter His Kingdom. You can hear this message throughout the Bible.

Someone may mix with Christians. Someone may be a member of a congregation. People may consider themselves members of the Church, but if they don't do the will of the Father, they will hear these the terrifying words: "I don't know you, depart from me".

What is the will of the Father? As God explains, it is not first and foremost about us doing something. It is about us listening to our God and receiving His gifts by faith.

The Father's will is first and foremost, that we trust Him as our God, that we love and obey Him as our God. That we come where He invites us, so that He can bless us with His Spirit and lead us to everlasting life.

The Father's will is summarized for us and reminded about again and again in both, the Old Testament and in the New, in the Ten ... yes, in the Ten Commandments.

This is how we love our God, when we keep His Commandments. And the first and the most important ones are about receiving Him and His gifts through His Son Jesus. So simple. But so many desire to do their own thing, despite the repeated warnings from Jesus.

Have you ever wondered, why does Jesus keep saying these unpleasant things, about many being left out? Does He want people to feel uncomfortable? What do you think? Most definitely, yes!

He wants everyone who is heading towards eternal death to feel extremely uncomfortable, He wants them to wake up and to realize where they have been heading and then to change their direction by 180 degrees, to repent and to return to Him, the very source of life. This is what Jesus wants.

This is God's grace and mercy that speaks those harsh words of warning. This is only because the Lord cares for all people and desires all people to be saved, that He continues to speak these words to us and to the world.

God's grace and mercy and patience in this age surpasses our understanding. This world, our country, and our community as well, keeps rejecting the Father and His Son together with the Gospel of eternal joy and blessedness.

Nevertheless, He keeps sending His messengers. Here I am, here we are today. The invitation is still being sent out. The words of Jesus are still preached. God is not giving up on this world and He won't until all who are chosen before the foundation of the world, are gathered in His Kingdom.

He still calls and sends pastors to teach and to preach, so that people can hear the voice and the words of Jesus. He sends His Spirit to stir us up to share what we have heard with those who haven't heard the invitation of Jesus.

He is God who doesn't turn away anyone, who comes to Him crying "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!" He welcomes and embraces everyone who seeks Him and desires to do His will. He wants all people to receive His gifts.

To the fools who reject Him now, He will say on the Last Day: "I don't know you, depart from me." But to you, who long for His presence, no matter who you are, no matter what your sins are, He will say: "I know you, come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Come!

Remember, these are not some random thoughts of your pastor. These are the very words and promises of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Lord and Redeemer. Listen to these words, and take them to your heart.

For these words not only tell you about the eternal life, they give it to you. And when the time is right our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, will come and will take you to His wedding feast.

This is our hope, this is our destination, this is God's promise to us. Amen.