

Matthew 25:1-13; Amos 5:18-24

23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 27)

November 8, 2020—Shepherd of the Mountains, Pinetop, AZ

IN

It's always going to be someone else, happen to someone else, isn't it? The warnings get more serious, more pointed, more urgent. "This may be hazardous to your health" becomes "this will cause lung cancer." But when you're young and dumb it's always going to be the other guy. But to be honest, how much do we take the serious warnings seriously, when nowadays practically everything under the sun is known to the state of CA to cause cancer?

"Warning: read all instructions before using any of our products. Serious injury or death can occur!" "I'm not stupid! I don't need anyone to tell me how to do my job" has been the sentiment of many a farmer or carpenter or shop teacher—many who now can only count to 9, or 8, or 7, if they are the lucky ones who still get to tie their shoes with both hands. But no, we don't need any of these warnings. None of us do. And then a trip to the emergency room, several stitches, a skin graft, a couple of pints of blood. But no, it won't happen to me. It only happens to the other guy, right?

To whom is Jesus speaking this morning? We heard Him speaking of warnings in the temple in previous weeks. But that was to the other guys. Those hypocritical religious leaders and their followers. Parable after parable in the temple along with some woes and warnings. Then we took a break for Reformation Day and All Saints' Day and now were back. But Jesus has moved on from where we left Him. He's not in the temple anymore.

As He and His disciples are leaving, the disciples exclaim over the buildings of the temple. And Jesus foretells its destruction which we now know eventually would come in 70 AD. And then there is a lot of talk of the end times and more warnings. That's the theme that runs through the end of the church year and as we anticipate a new one. Warning! Christmas is coming!

But the warnings aren't about decorating with the right lights on the right day and singing the right hymns that everyone knows and loves, and how will we arrange the manger scene this year. The warnings are about something else that is coming—the Day of the Lord, the Judgment, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords returning. Jesus is coming! Warning! Will it be for you a day of light or a day of darkness?

It's more urgent. It's more serious. It's more applicable with each passing day to everyone. It's not for the other guy. It's for you! How do we know this? Because Jesus is speaking *these* parables of warning to His very disciples, the ones who eventually be called apostles, leaders of His church, believers. *They* need to take His warnings seriously. And so do *we!* We do not know the day or the hour. We must be prepared.

Ten virgins go to meet the bridegroom. But he is delayed. Five of them are wise. Five of them are morons. *That's the Greek. μορός from which we get the word moron. But it's not nice to say that in church so usually we soften it a bit.* All of them became drowsy and slept. And then suddenly there is the awakening cry. "Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." They all went out. But the morons were unprepared. They had no oil. "Give us some of your oil" they plead to the wise maidens. "There won't be enough. Go get your own."

The wise go in; the foolish, stupid, moronic are shut out. "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you." "Watch therefore," Jesus says, "for you know neither the day nor the hour."

We can get so caught up in the details with some of these parables. Who are the virgins? Why virgins? What is the lamp? What is the oil? Why was the bridegroom delayed? Who are these dealers who would be open at such a late hour? What does it mean that these ladies fell asleep?

But to spend much time on most of those details would detract from the point. And here is the point. Our Bridegroom is coming. We don't know when. Are we ready now?

The people of Amos' day though they were ready. They were looking forward to the Day of

the Lord as much as these virgins were looking forward to the coming bridegroom. They were God's chosen people. They were performing all of the necessary rituals. They thought that was enough. But the ceremonies were empty. Alongside their sacrifices and songs and prayers to Yahweh, they also made sacrifices to the false gods of their neighbors. They refused to care for their poor and instead took advantage of them. The Day of the Lord, to them, meant confirmation of their identities, health, wealth, prosperity, freedom from oppression. The Day of the Lord *would* come, but it would not be a good day for these foolish people.

**"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen."** Amos 5:21-23

In other words, "I do not know you." They were not prepared. Their lamps were empty with no spare oil.

But that won't be *us*. That will be the other guy! Maybe not. The parable may be a hypothetical story, but the warning was spoken to very real people for a reason. The people of Amos' day were very real people. And through God's prophet they were made aware of just how unprepared they had become.

So how do we make sure we are prepared, unlike those people of Amos' day or the five foolish virgins? How do we ensure that *we* are the wise ones?

Psalm 14:1 tells us **"The fool says in his heart, 'there is no God.'"** Well, that likely doesn't describe anyone here today. But it is equally foolish to say in your heart, "I'll take God seriously tomorrow. I'll think about my salvation and the eternal state of my soul later."

God is giving to you His Word now. He is offering you salvation today. St. Paul says, **"working together with Him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'in a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."** 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, God does not need you here in church. He is not appeased by your songs, your standing up and sitting down at the proper time, by your familiarity with our liturgy. That's what the people of Amos' day had devolved into. An empty worship life. Empty practices. And they thought that simply by doing them, they were covered. The *SS* term for that is *ex opere operato*. And it is what Jesus continued to run up against as He came proclaiming His kingdom to a people who had been steeped in works righteousness.

He doesn't need our works and our practices. And especially, if they are not driven by faith, He will not look upon them. But He has established His church so that there would be a place for Him to work on you, for His Word and Sacraments to prepare you.

As we began today in His triune name, we were each reminded of how He has prepared us through the waters of baptism, by filling, not lamps with oil, but our hearts with His Spirit and with faith.

As we receive His Word here and in Bible classes and are confronted by it, He prepares us to receive the good news that He is the one preparing us, who has made us acceptable through faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And as you receive Him in His Supper today He continues to make you prepared, with extra helpings of forgiveness, life, and salvation already purchased for you on the Cross, and now experienced by us with all 5 senses. A foretaste of the feast to come in the place prepared for the people He has prepared.

We do not know the day or the hour, but our Bridegroom is coming. And His kingdom is not for some other guy. It is for you...right now...and forever. Amen.