

## **Friends, Are You Ready for Jesus' Return?**

### *Introduction*

- Members: Grandpa's 85<sup>th</sup>. Guests: welcome. Maybe posters in community or mail we sent; maybe with friend, invited. "FS" – special effort invite friends. Always welcome guests at church, today special: really want to show friends what St. John's is all about in worship and in school, open house. So if guest and St. John's isn't your church home, welcome. We consider you friends here at church.
- Part of service: spend time thinking about one Bible reading. Today, Gospel (stood for), Mt 25, story or parable about 10 virgins with lamps waiting for bridegroom on wedding day. Parable: story about earthly activity we can relate to that teaches deeper heavenly truth. Here, earthly activity, wedding. **Vs. 1-5.** So, that's earthly activity: wedding.

### *Parable of Ten Virgins*

- Some strange details, because wedding customs back then were different. We have our wedding customs: focus on bride – grand entrance; when b/g arrive at reception, introduced with music and applause; big deal about cutting cake, throwing bouquet. Our wedding customs. Back then, customs: focus on groom – grand entrance; wedding ceremony at bride's home (of father) with family; when done, procession through streets to groom's house for reception; people would wait outside groom's home or along way for arrival of couple to celebrate; no strict timeline; could take hours. Customs.
- Here, 10 young ladies waiting for b/g to arrive; 5 wise, 5 foolish. Wise are prepared for long wait; brought lots of oil to keep lamps burning into night. Foolish didn't bring any oil; unprepared.
- That's setting of this parable, story that teaches deeper heavenly truth. What is that truth? In this parable, Jesus is groom, we are young ladies on road waiting for him. Someday, Last Day, end of world, Jesus will return and bring his people to wedding reception at his home in heaven. But that may be long into future, and so we need to be ready! We need lamps lit, generous supply of oil so they stay lit; that's how we'll be ready. That's heavenly truth in story: Jesus may take a long time in coming, but he will come: either at end of world or end of life! We need to be ready and wise, not foolish and unprepared. Jesus is coming; we need to be ready.

### *Be ready!*

- Question I have for you, everyone here today: friends, are you ready for Jesus' return? Ask that of members (whether long or short) and friends (guests joining us today): ready? That is question Jesus wants us to think about when we hear this parable; because he knows only way to enter wedding reception in heaven is to be prepared with oil in lamps and faith in hearts. Reason St. John's LC&S exists: fill people with oil of faith to keep lamps burning and make ready for Jesus' return. So in Sunday services, when we worship and hear God's Word, God refills our oil, makes us ready. When students come to school, learn about Jesus in classrooms, God refills their oil, makes ready. This church exists to be a place where our jars of oil are refilled so we can be ready for Jesus' return.
- And, that's why today we're having FS. We love all friends; want them to come here to have faith in Jesus Christ strengthened (lamps filled with oil), so ready for Jesus' return. If parable teaches us anything, 2 things: Jesus definitely coming back (not myth), end of world will come, or end of life will come, and Jesus will return; and we don't want to be foolish, unprepared, but ready. So on FS we want everyone to know that St. John's is a place to refill oil, grow in faith in Jesus, and be ready.
- We think pretty important! Urgency in verses! Remember what happened to foolish virgins: heard groom was coming, woke up, tried to get lamps ready, no oil! Couldn't get any from wise; groom already here, too late! At last second, tried to buy some; too late. Missed chance! Weren't allowed into reception because weren't ready. Missed chance. Urgent message and reason why Jesus tells parable: doesn't want us to miss chance and be left out of heaven!

- Also reason why we at St. John's invite friends to church: we don't want anyone to miss their chance. Don't want Jesus to come on Last Day; we look around, friends have no oil in lamps. Me personally: when I think about how to be a friend, most important to help them be ready for Jesus' return, so they don't miss chance to go to heavenly wedding reception. What kind of a friend am I if I don't at least invite people to hear about Jesus? Why I invite people to church. Lot of people at St. John's feel same way. Urgency in verses: Jesus is coming!
- At same time, don't miss big picture: Jesus is telling this parable because he is our friend! Jesus is our best friend; he, more than anyone else, wants us ready for his return because he wants us to be with him in heaven! He's the one who came to earth in first place to be our Savior. Saw all wrong things, sinful things, we've done in life (that would keep us out of heaven). But loved us so much that he paid punishment we deserved for those sins. Paid for it on cross, where suffered and died for you and me and whole world. That's the kind of friend Jesus is: rather die on cross than see you left out of heaven. You can't imagine how much Jesus loves you, how much he wants every one of you in heaven. That's why he's telling this parable; saying: "Trust in me as Savior; fill lamps with oil of faith in me; be ready for my return." Jesus is your friend; wants you ready.

*Conclusion: Are You Ready?*

- Question: friends, are you ready for Jesus' return? Feel like faith in Christ is strong, or are you running low on oil? Have a church home that teaches you about Jesus' love for you, or have you been away from church for awhile?
- Remember TV ads from 1980s, where two glass beer steins are crashed into each other and shattered, said FDLF drive drunk. Today: FDLF be unprepared for Jesus' return. Only way to be prepared is to keep oil of faith burning brightly in your lamp. And here at St. John's we want to help you keep your faith in Jesus Christ strong and burning brightly. That's why members come; why members invite friends to come.
- Friends, are you ready for Jesus' return. Whether it comes at end of world, or at end of your life, Jesus wants you ready. So trust in Jesus: as your Savior, your friend, who loves you, died for you, invites you to the wedding reception, refills your oil of faith, wants you to be with him in heaven, and who is returning someday. Trust in Jesus, dear friends, and you'll be ready. Amen.

**Matthew 25:1-13 (NIV 1984)**

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. <sup>4</sup> The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

<sup>6</sup> "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

<sup>7</sup> "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

<sup>9</sup> "'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

<sup>10</sup> "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

<sup>11</sup> "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!'

<sup>12</sup> "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

<sup>13</sup> "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."