

Always Be Ready

November 8, 2020

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our church year is not the same as our temporal calendar year. The ecclesiastical year begins with the four Sundays before Christmas and follows Jesus' life, to His death on the cross, His resurrection, and His ascension. After that, we focus on His teachings, how they relate to us, and how we need to obey His command to share His teachings with others around us. And that brings us to this week, the first of three weeks which begins at the conclusion of the church year.

In these last three weeks of the church year, we focus on the return of Jesus or the end times concluding the last Sunday when we celebrate Jesus our King, Christ, the King. The King who reigns for eternity over His church, His people, the Church Triumphant – you. We prepared for this end of the church year and our reflections on the End Times last Sunday when we gave thanks for all the saints who have died in the faith. Those who have died believing in Jesus and were called to be with Him in heaven. We remember them fondly as those who lived among us keeping their eyes on the one who was their Savior and died with the faith that He would call them home to Him.

They confessed, probably every Sunday, the same thing you confessed today. You said you believed in Jesus who lived, died, and was buried (just like they were, and you and I may be) and that Jesus rose from death and then ascended into heaven. They confessed and so did you this morning that there will be a resurrection of the dead and a life everlasting. In other words, there is no END to the story for Jesus and his followers, you and me. There is only an intermission between the temporal time of our death and the heavenly time of our resurrection and life in glory in the Kingdom of Heaven. That is what they believed and confessed and what you confessed this morning. But what does the world say to that?

The world asks for evidence. The world asks for proof. The world says show me the facts. Show me a shred of tangible evidence that Jesus died and rose back to life. Show me. Show me a shred of tangible evidence that Jesus ascended into heaven. Give me proof. Show me that anyone in this world will physically be raised from death (having turned to ashes and dust). What physical, tangible proof is there that this can and will happen? What is your answer? What can you say? Do you have anything that is tangible evidence that any of this is true or real or possible or probable?

You have a book of writings by ancient prophets and evangelists who wrote it was all true. You have the words of a human called Jesus who said He was the Son of God and that these things would happen. Other than that, you

can't prove to the world any of it. You haven't got a stitch of evidence it is true. You and I accept all this on the basis of faith. Faith that comes not from us who are part of the unbelieving world but faith based on a powerful spiritual force that comes from outside our sinful, human self and is conveyed by the great power we call the Holy Spirit (which you confessed to this morning as well). And, that faith is first instilled in us at our baptism. It is strengthened and supported and maintained by the reading of that book of writings, the Bible, and studying it deeply and intensely. That faith is strengthened by our reception of the Sacrament of the Altar and our confession that it is true.

You and I have faith and that is all that we have to tell the world that the end is near. Unfortunately, the world, which is heavily influenced by Satan, looks at our proof as lame and weak. It is like the motorists on a road in Minnesota driving past two farmers who lived on either side of a road. As cars came by them the two farmers shouted out, the end is near, the end is near! They even erected signs saying the same thing, *"The end is near."* Most motorists heard them and ignored them. They read their signs and said, *"Crazy Christian zealots!"* But every time, the motorists roared on down the road and ignored those warnings, there was the sound of screeching and crashing and then silence. And every time, that happened the farmers would come out and say, *"What can we do? We warn them and warn them, but they never listen. That bridge has been out*

for three years and the cliff sure isn't getting any shallower."

After the triumphal march into Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday and knowing that His end was near, Jesus took His disciples out to the Mount of Olives and taught them about what was to come. He was preparing them for the future. His teachings are called the Olivet Discourse. He foretold the destruction of the temple, the appearance of false prophets and teachers, some even claiming to be Him, the torture and death they would face as His disciples, a period of tribulation, desolation, and a worsening of times on earth during which the world would be given a chance to accept Jesus. And then, He described His return. Jesus would appear like the brilliance of the sun on the horizon in the morning accompanied by angels. There will be no mistaking this Second Coming. Everyone will know – believers and non-believers.

And despite what hundreds of humans have said (including a famous televangelist who as recently as last Tuesday, October 20th predicted the outcome of our election this week) a period of unrest and the end of the world in five years when an asteroid will hit the earth and destroy it, Jesus said no one will know the day or the time that He will return and the world will end. That televangelist may be one of those false prophets Jesus was speaking about because he has predicted the end of the world would be in 1982 and also, on precisely on April 27, 2007. He needs to

hear what Jesus has said, no one will know the day or the time that this is to happen.

Jesus told His disciples and us (because thankfully they recorded His words for us) seven parables which stressed the importance of the signs preceding His return.

Beginning with the parable of the fig tree and concluding with the parable in our Gospel reading today of the ten virgins. (I encourage you to take out your Bibles today and read these parables in Chapter 24 of Matthews Gospel.)

The parable of the virgins was relatively easy for the people of Jesus' time to understand. But you may need some background information concerning weddings in the ancient Near East to help understand this parable. First, the parents arranged a marriage with the consent of the bride and groom. Second, the couple had to observe an engagement period of several months during which it was clear, hopefully, that the bride was a virgin. During this time, the groom might also be building or arranging for a place for the couple to live. Third, on the day of the wedding, the groom would go to the bride's house to claim his bride from her parents. His friends would accompany him. Fourth, the marriage ceremony would take place at the bride's home. Fifth, on the evening of the day of the wedding, the groom would take his bride to their home. This usually involved a nighttime procession through the streets. Most marriages in Jesus' day took place at night. Sixth, the bride and groom would consummate their

marriage at the groom's (now the couple's) home the night of the wedding ceremony. Finally, there would be a banquet that would often last as long as seven days. This often took place at the groom's home or the new home of the couple.

The scene in this parable is at night when the bride's friends are waiting to welcome the couple and to enter the groom's house where the banquet will be held. So there were some who were prepared and ready as they waited a long time for the Bridegroom to come. They had enough oil. They planned ahead and were prepared in case there was a delay. Some didn't plan or prepare. They were caught with the dilemma of not having enough oil and then having to leave and find a source of extra oil – they couldn't borrow any and then, they found the source, the shops, was now closed. As a result, they missed the procession and were too late for the celebration banquet.

When I asked you earlier what your basis for what you believed some of you probably thought I was a heretic. You knew (and so did I) it is faith. Faith that Jesus died, faith that Jesus arose, faith that He ascended into heaven, and faith that He will come again for the living and the dead.

Your faith is the oil that Jesus is describing in this parable. We are among all other people who have invited to join in heavenly banquet by Jesus when He comes. We need to prepare by being sure our faith is sufficient and adequate for the time when He comes. This means that we need to

prepare ahead like the wise virgins. We need to bolster our faith with the Word and Sacraments.

Those who do not do so, who let their faith burn out, will be caught short on the day of the coming of Jesus. They will try to do last-minute borrowing from us (but faith cannot be attained in that way) or they will go to some other source to get faith – false teachers, the things of this world, or the things that Satan wants us to believe and they will come up empty. The door will be closed, and the banquet will begin. Their knocks on the door to the banquet hall will be met with painful words of denial from Jesus – *“I don’t know you.”*

We have two tasks before us then as we await the end of this temporal time. An end that may come with our temporal death or the end of the earth. We have to keep our faith burning brightly. We have to be ready with a fully stocked cask of oil – we cannot let the flame of faith die out. The second task is to be like the two farmers in Minnesota, warning others that the end is near.

Encouraging, teaching, and praying that others will prepare by having faith that they will be ready for the end and not be lost. These are the ones in our families for who the flame of faith is wavering. These are the ones in our neighborhoods, our workplaces our schools, our communities, and our world for who the light of faith has not even been lit. We are their only hope for a bright future in heaven with Jesus.

The only thing we know for certain is that Jesus is coming again. He is coming to get His faithful bride, His church, you, and me. He has delayed his return -waiting for the time when everyone who has life and breath can come to faith in Him. He has selected us to be His, to build our faith in Him and help Him, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to save those who might hear the words, *"I don't know you."*

Turn up your lamps of faith, be prepared with extra steadfast faith, help those who need to do the same, and WATCH, Jesus is coming again. He is coming for you and me. He may come for you before the end of temporal time or we may all witness His brilliant coming on the horizon when a trumpet sound announces Him, and angels accompany Him. BE READY at all times because the one in whom you have faith, the one in whom you believe, Jesus, has told all of us *"Watch for you know neither the day nor the hour."* BE READY with a full stock of faith so that you will be a part of the procession to the wedding feast and not be late only to hear the words: *"I do not know you."* Amen.