ST. PETER LUTHERAN CHURCH

Rev. Raymond Van Buskirk

BE PREPARED

AS WE GATHER

As we prepare to end the Church Year, a good question is "Are you prepared?" We think about closing out this year and preparing for the next. Ultimately the question for us is "Are we prepared to meet God face-to-face?" How do we prepare ourselves and others for His kingdom?

OLD TESTAMENT: AMOS 5:18–24

(God will permit Israel's enemies to invade them [in 722 B.C.] because their kings are evil, the people are immoral and practice idolatry, and they pervert justice.)

[18] Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light, **[19]** as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. **[20]** Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

[God says:] **[21]** "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. **[22]** 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. **[23]** Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. **[24]** But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

THE EPISTLE: 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13–16

(When the Final Judgement comes, believers need not fear, but have a sure hope in Jesus Christ for themselves and all the saints. He will deliver and bless those who are righteous through faith.)

[13] But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. **[14]** For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. **[15]** For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. **[16]** For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

THE GOSPEL: MATTHEW 25:1–13

(When Judgement Day comes, those in the faith with the light of Christ in their hearts will enter into the marriage feast of the Lamb. Unbelievers will descend into Hell. Therefore, be prepared.)

[1] "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. **[2]** Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. **[3]** For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, **[4]** but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. **[5]** As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. **[6]** But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' **[7]** Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. **[8]** And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' **[9]** 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.' **[10]** 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. **[11]** Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' **[12]** But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' **[13]** Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

SERMON: BE PREPARED

Are you prepared?

In early October 2023, Israel was celebrating Yom Kippur, the time of atonement and repentance to God for personal sins and their belief of a sealing of one's fate for the upcoming year. They said in Hebrew to one another "May you be sealed in the Book of Life." Little did they know that while they were in solemn celebration, Hamas was going to attack them, kill over 1300 in the most ghastly ways, and take over 200 hostages. War resulted and there is not really peace even today. Israel was not prepared.

Every year there are fatal car crashes, unexpected heart attacks, and natural disasters. But, most people act like they don't have a care in the world. They aren't planning on such events. People are shocked, "How could this happen?" They were not prepared.

Are you prepared?

Jesus told a story about wise and foolish maidens (Matthew 25:1-13). He told us that the kingdom of heaven would be like maidens awaiting the call to a wedding. The bridegroom was delayed and at midnight arrived.

Five wise maidens had oil in their lamps and were awake awaiting the bridegroom. Five foolish maidens were unprepared. When the bridegroom arrived, the foolish did not have time to buy oil for their lamps and who could sell them oil at that hour?

It was too late for the foolish maidens. The host left them outside the wedding feast because they were not prepared. The wise feasted inside.

So it will be when Christ returns in glory. The oil of faith from the Holy Spirit is free. You don't buy it. You receive it in a willing heart by heeding the Gospel. Those who hold fast to God's Word and Sacraments will be prepared. They will be strong in faith with the Holy Spirit shining brightly in their hearts. They will be doing Christ's work on earth.

The foolish are the ones who, although they once believed, later ignore God's Word and Sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are distracted by the world. Because Christ has not yet returned, they forget God and His promises. The foolish forget to pray, worship God, read the Bible and eat the Lord's Supper. They are spiritually starving themselves to death. The light of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and their faith are flickering, in jeopardy of going out and losing faith and the hope of heaven.

The reality is that Christ will return. One thousand years is like one day to God. It has not been two days since Christ died in our place on the cross at Calvary. We are in the End Times. The Bible tells us that the earth will be destroyed and there will be new heavens and a new earth where righteousness will reign. Christ will judge the living and the dead, welcoming the people who are prepared and leaving outside those unprepared.

Are you prepared?

An untimely death, a war or a natural disaster may end your days on earth. Be prepared to meet Jesus Christ any and every day of the week. Christ Jesus is the bridegroom looking to take all people who believe in him to the most wonderful wedding feast ever. Repent of your sins. Ask Him to forgive you. He will wash you clean by His blood and prepare you for heaven. Live by God's Word and Sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper which assure you of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

Christ Jesus promises you grace and forgiveness and peace. He loves you. Be prepared to see Him face-to-face at the glorious wedding feast in heaven. Won't you also help the people around you to prepare? In Jesus' name, Amen.

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