Mondovi: Our Savior's, Gilmanton & Montana: Salem United Methodist Churches
11.8.2026, 24th Sunday after Pentecost, Rev. Hyuntae Kim, Ph.D.

Waiting for the Bridegroom
Matthew 25:1-13

Let us pray: Father God, we hunger for your word. Fill us with the bread of life through your living word. As we hear your word proclaimed, grant that in the Holy Spirit we may have fellowship with the Father and with the Son. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Greek mythology, there is a figure named Kairos. He is the personification of "opportunity" or "the decisive moment." One of the most striking features of his appearance is that he has thick hair in the front but is bald in the back. Why is the front of his head covered with hair? So that people can easily grasp him as he approaches. Why is the back bald? So that once he has passed by, no one can seize him.

Biblically, the word *kairos* is distinguished from *chronos*, which refers to the ordinary passage of time. *Kairos* refers to a decisive moment in which God acts with purpose and intervenes in human life. In 2 Corinthians 6:2, Paul declares: "For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."

In his grace, God has provided moments of *kairos* through Jesus Christ within the flow of ordinary time, moments when people encounter God and their lives are transformed. That means right now, as you are hearing this message, is the time of God's favor. Now is the day of salvation. Now is *kairos*. Now is the opportunity.

Yet today's Parable of the Ten Virgins warns us that a day will come when the door of grace, the door of salvation, will be shut. Therefore, Jesus urges us to stay awake. The reason we must remain watchful is that we do not know "the day or the hour," that is, the *kairos* when the Lord will return.

What does it mean to stay awake? According to today's parable, it means being prepared with oil. After all, all ten virgins fell asleep.

In first-century Israel, weddings followed a period of betrothal that typically lasted about a year before the wedding celebration took place. During that time, the groom prepared a home for the couple, while the bride prepared herself for married life. Although the wedding day was known, the exact hour of the groom's arrival was often uncertain.

Unlike modern weddings, which are usually completed in a matter of hours, wedding celebrations in those days often involved the entire village and could last for a week. Because there were many preparations to be made, unexpected delays could arise, causing the groom's departure to be postponed. In addition, people often traveled in the evening to avoid the intense heat of the day. For these and other reasons, the bridesmaids had to wait for a groom whose arrival time was unknown.

When the cry rang out announcing the groom's arrival, the bride, together with her friends, would go out to meet him. For this reason, lamps were essential. It is also said that the wedding banquet doors

would be shut in order to protect the celebration from robbers who sometimes targeted wedding feasts.

Jesus told this parable to his disciples. Therefore, the ten virgins can be understood as representing the disciples. And if we are disciples of Jesus, they represent us as well. The bride waiting for the bridegroom, Jesus, is the church. Since we are members of the church, we are part of the bride. Yet in the sense that we are waiting and preparing the way for the bridegroom's arrival, we are also like these bridesmaids.

One of the most important features of this parable is that the ten virgins are divided into two groups: the wise and the foolish. To be foolish means to lack wisdom. In Scripture, wisdom is defined by one's relationship to God. Proverbs 1:7 says: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Here, "knowledge" is being used in a sense closely related to wisdom. In other words, wisdom begins with fearing the Lord.

The fear of the Lord does not mean living in terror of God. Rather, it means honoring and revering him, seeking to understand his heart and will, and desiring to live according to his word. Therefore, foolishness is the opposite. It is not to live according to his word.

The difference between the wise and the foolish virgins is whether they have oil or not. More precisely, it is whether they have an extra supply of oil. In verse 8, the foolish virgins say, "Our lamps are going out."

The wise virgins prepared extra oil because they understood that the bridegroom might be delayed. Scripture makes it clear that Jesus will return, but it also tells us that his return is not necessarily immediate. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1 and following, we see that many people in Paul's day expected the kingdom of God to arrive very soon. However, Paul explains that the day of the Lord would not come immediately, but that certain things would take place first.

The foolish are those who have little interest in God's word and therefore make no provision for an extra supply of oil.

Interestingly, the ten virgins have much in common. They were all invited to the wedding feast. They all accepted the invitation. They all served as bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom. When the bridegroom's arrival was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. They all carried lamps.

The "lamps" mentioned here were likely not the small household lamps used indoors. They were more like torches. Small lamps would have been too vulnerable to the wind and unsuitable for a wedding procession. These torches were typically made with a cloth-wrapped head that could hold a generous amount of oil and burn brightly as the wedding party traveled through the streets. To keep the flame burning, oil had to be replenished regularly.

What, then, does the lamp represent? We can understand the lamp as representing the outward forms of faith. It includes things such as attending church, participating in worship, reading Scripture, praying, memorizing Bible verses, and possessing a great deal of biblical knowledge. These things are not bad. In fact, they are necessary. After all, a lamp is needed if a flame is to burn. Yet by themselves they are not enough. The outward form of faith cannot be a substitute for substance. The lamp is essential, but it exists for the sake of the flame.

What does the light of the lamp represent? The flame shines on the coming bridegroom. Therefore, it represents our witness to Jesus Christ. This witness may take the form of verbal testimony, or it may be expressed through good deeds. Jesus referred to John the Baptist as "a lamp that burned and gave light" (John 5:35). John was a lamp because he testified to the coming bridegroom, Jesus. The church today has the same calling.

In Matthew 5:16, Jesus said: "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." In this way, the church serves as a lamp that points people to Jesus, both through its words and through its good works.

What, then, does the oil represent? There are several interpretations, but I believe the oil represents the Holy Spirit. The disciples did not fully understand Jesus from the beginning, nor were they able to bear effective witness to him on their own. It was after the coming of the Holy Spirit that they truly came to know him and boldly proclaimed him. And what is one of the Holy Spirit's primary ministries? To testify about Jesus.

Without the anointing of the Holy Spirit, we may read Scripture and hear sermons, yet remain spiritually sleepy, hardly understanding what we have heard. We fail to hear the *rhema* word, the living word that God is speaking personally into our lives.

In the Old Testament, the tabernacle contained the Holy Place. Inside were the golden lampstand, the table of the bread of the Presence, and the altar of incense. The tabernacle was covered with four thick layers of fabric, making the interior completely dark. As a result, the bread on the table could only be seen and eaten when the golden lampstand was burning. The lampstand could not give light unless it was supplied with olive oil. In the same way, we must read God's word in the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Only then can we truly receive and digest the bread of the word. Only then does Scripture become a living reality in our daily lives.

We can maintain religious practices and even do good works without the power of the Holy Spirit. But it is exhausting, because we are doing it in our own strength. And little spiritual power is seen. I believe many churches today, including our own United Methodist tradition, struggle with this very issue. It is an area in which we need to repent and return to the Lord. Of course, we pray and seek God's help. Yet I still feel that the supply of oil is often not enough. Only when we are filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit can we remain faithful in times of persecution or crisis and continue to bear witness to Jesus.

It is not that the Holy Spirit is absent from us. He is answering many of our prayers, both great and small. Yet we still hunger for a revival that has not yet come.

Consider the churches of Asia Minor, including the once-thriving church of Ephesus. They have disappeared. The churches where Martin Luther and John Calvin once ministered now stand largely empty and have become historical landmarks visited by tourists. Methodist churches that experienced powerful revivals through the ministry of John Wesley and his spiritual descendants through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are now often attended mostly by the elderly, and many have closed their doors.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not something we seek once and then forget. It is something we must continually pursue. We are like cracked jars. No matter how carefully a cracked jar is repaired, water will eventually leak out somewhere. Therefore, our only hope is to be immersed deeply in the river of grace that is Christ. When a broken jar is submerged in water, it remains full despite its cracks.

My prayer is that none of us who are gathered here today will be found among the foolish virgins. How, then, do we prepare the oil of the Holy Spirit and become wise virgins?

When the foolish virgins asked the wise ones to share some of their oil, the wise replied, "No, there may not be enough for both us and you."

At first, that sounds selfish. Certainly, olive oil was expensive in those days, making it difficult to share. But we must remember that this is a parable, and Jesus is teaching a spiritual truth. The oil is not the kind of thing that can simply be transferred from one person to another. The substance of faith is ultimately personal. No one else can be saved on our behalf. A wife's spiritual fullness does not automatically make her husband spiritually full. A father's faith does not automatically make his children children of God. That is why it is famously said: "God has no grandchildren."

Each person must respond to God's grace personally. Before the door of grace is shut, let us earnestly seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Let us worship with a deep longing for his presence. Let us proclaim God's word aloud. Let us sing his praises with faith and expectation.

May we stay awake and be ready for the day of the Lord. May we be a church filled with the light of the Holy Spirit, shining the light of Jesus to the world around us. Amen.

Let us pray: In this time of God's favor, in this day of salvation, we desire to offer our whole hearts to you. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us in fullness, so that we may always have an ample supply of oil. Keep us watchful and alert, that we may remain faithful through every trial and faithfully await the coming of the bridegroom, Jesus, however long he may tarry. Grant that we may at last welcome him with joy and enter the wedding feast of the New Jerusalem. In the name of Jesus Christ, our bridegroom and Lord. Amen.