

**24<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
NOVEMBER 12, 2023**



**The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids**

**ST. JOHN UNITED  
CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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**\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

ONE: Put away the things you have substituted for God. Let your worship of the one true God be genuine.

**MANY: We seek to know God and to rejoice before our Creator. We know that God is beyond all our false images.**

ONE: God is not deceived by our solemn assemblies. Our empty festivals do not impress our God.

**MANY: We want to give joyous expression to a growing faith. We choose to serve the God whom Jesus revealed.**

ONE: Our hope is in God's grace beyond all judgment. Our trust is in God's love, greater than our feeble imitation.

**MANY: We welcome the light God promises us. We seek to respond with faithful service.**

**\*INVOCATION:**

God of our ancestors, be our God today as we gather in sincerity and faithfulness to honor you. Attune our hearts to your commandments as we remember your mighty acts. Declare your Word to us so we may be inspired to obey. We know that we must decide today whether or not we will serve you. Not to decide is to reject you. O God, save us from the idols that appear so attractive to us, the toys that take so

much of our attention and the pursuits that dominate our time. Make your dwelling place with us here. Amen.

**\*CALL TO CONFESSION:**

How seriously do we regard the decrees of our spiritual ancestors? The psalmist commands the teaching of God's law to our children, that we and they might not forget all that God has done. Obedience to the way of the life God sets before us makes hope real. Let us confess our need for help.

**\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION: If sin means cutting ourselves off from you, O God, and being unprepared to respond to your presence, surely we have sinned. Our lamps are not trimmed; our lives are not ready for your trumpet call. We have not listened well or encouraged one another in the faith. The distraction of many things has kept us from meditation and prayer. We are witnesses against ourselves, for we have vowed our loyalty and then have gone our own way. Merciful God, we seek your forgiveness. Amen. Silence**

**\*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:**

God brought our spiritual ancestors out of bondage and protected them along their way. We believe God

is eager to free us from all that imprisons us. Our days on earth are a trust from God and we serve God best by investing our time in learning and living God's intentions for us. It is God's will that we live in harmony with one another, that we learn to love all God's children. God extends full pardon to us. Praise God for forgiveness and a second chance.

**\*GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat two more times.) (end) One God always here. One God always here.**

**SCRIPTURE LESSONS: Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25**  
**What God has done**

**24** Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders of Israel, its leaders, judges, and officers. They presented themselves before God. <sup>2</sup> Then Joshua said to the entire people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Long ago your ancestors lived on the other side of the Euphrates. They served other gods. Among them was Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor. <sup>3</sup> I took Abraham your ancestor from the other side of the Euphrates. I led him around through the

whole land of Canaan. I added to his descendants and gave him Isaac.

**Challenge to be faithful** <sup>14</sup> “So now, revere the LORD. Serve him honestly and faithfully. Put aside the gods that your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates and in Egypt and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup> But if it seems wrong in your opinion to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Choose the gods whom your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But my family and I will serve the LORD.” <sup>16</sup> Then the people answered, “God forbid that we ever leave the LORD to serve other gods! <sup>17</sup> The LORD is our God. He is the one who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. He has done these mighty signs in our sight. He has protected us the whole way we’ve gone and in all the nations through which we’ve passed. <sup>18</sup> The LORD has driven out all the nations before us, including the Amorites who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God.” <sup>19</sup> Then Joshua said to the people, “You can’t serve the LORD, because he is a holy God. He is a jealous God. He won’t forgive your rebellion and your sins. <sup>20</sup> If you leave the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn around and do you harm and finish you off, in spite of

having done you good in the past.” <sup>21</sup> Then the people said to Joshua, “No! The LORD is the one we will serve.” <sup>22</sup> So Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD.” They said, “We are witnesses!”

<sup>23</sup> “So now put aside the foreign gods that are among you. Focus your hearts on the LORD, the God of Israel.” <sup>24</sup> The people said to Joshua, “We will serve the LORD our God and will obey him.” **Joshua makes a covenant** <sup>25</sup> On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people and established just rule for them at Shechem.

### **EPISTLE LESSON: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** **Believers who have died**

<sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, we want you to know about people who have died (or fallen asleep) so that you won’t mourn like others who don’t have any hope. <sup>14</sup> Since we believe that Jesus died and rose, so we also believe that God will bring with him those who have died in Jesus. <sup>15</sup> What we are saying is a message from the Lord: we who are alive and still around at the Lord’s coming definitely won’t go ahead of those who have died. <sup>16</sup> This is because the Lord himself will come down from heaven with the signal of a shout by the head angel and a blast on

God's trumpet. First, those who are dead in Christ will rise. <sup>17</sup> Then, we who are living and still around will be taken up together with them in the clouds to meet with the Lord in the air. That way we will always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> So encourage each other with these words.

**\*GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 25:1-13**

**Parable of the ten young bridesmaids**

25 "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten young bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom. <sup>2</sup> Now five of them were wise, and the other five were foolish. <sup>3</sup> The foolish ones took their lamps but didn't bring oil for them. <sup>4</sup> But the wise ones took their lamps and also brought containers of oil. <sup>5</sup> "When the groom was late in coming, they all became drowsy and went to sleep. <sup>6</sup> But at midnight there was a cry, 'Look, the groom! Come out to meet him.' <sup>7</sup> "Then all those bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps. <sup>8</sup> But the foolish bridesmaids said to the wise ones, 'Give us some of your oil, because our lamps have gone out.' <sup>9</sup> "But the wise bridesmaids replied, 'No, because if we share with you, there won't be enough for our lamps and yours. We have a better idea. You go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' <sup>10</sup> But while they were gone to buy oil, the groom came.

Those who were ready went with him into the wedding. Then the door was shut.

<sup>11</sup> "Later the other bridesmaids came and said, 'Lord, lord, 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 alert, because you don't know the day or the hour.

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

**MESSAGE: "Be ready but be patient."**

When you see those words; "be ready but be patient", does an event come to mind? I think of a pregnant woman whose 40 weeks are up and she's ready to cuddle her new baby. She has her bag packed with clothes for herself, that will probably be too tight, and clothes for the baby that will probably be too big. She's been through her Childbirth Classes and she has names picked out. She is ready. She is prepared. However, evidently the baby is not.

Two weeks later she is still ready – maybe overly ready. She is edgy and her patience is growing thin. She decides to go with her mother to a very nice restaurant for lunch and as she sits on the beautiful linen chair, her water breaks.

She wasn't prepared for that!

Matthew 24:36 <sup>36</sup> “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

Our Gospel reading this morning contains the parable of the ten maidens and is found only in the gospel of Matthew. The parable concerns the future that governs the discussion from 24:36 to 25:46 – the certain but uncertain final day and hour. In verse 13 of our reading, the urging to “watch” is the commentary on the entire section and not particularly on the parable of the maidens. In this parable, it is not watchfulness that is being instructed, after all, the wise maidens slept also.

That’s the surprise about this parable. It has nothing to do with oil and lamps. The issue is preparedness in the face of uncertainty. Verse 5 “the bridegroom was delayed”. In chapter 24:48 it reads “My master is delayed” and in Matthew 25:19 we can read “After a long time the master of these servants came.” It may have been that on the lips of Jesus the parable was designed to speak of preparation in view of the kingdom having arrived at the door, but in the words of the writer of the Gospel of Matthew, the story is in the futuristic mode.

As the parable has it, the delay of the bridegroom created the crisis for some of the maidens; the delay was the circumstance about which some proved wise

and some foolish; the delay triggered the series of events ending in the final exclusion of those unprepared.

Your vocabulary word for this week is “Parousia”, the Greek word meaning “coming” or “arrival”. Perhaps you have heard this word before. It’s a word used to describe the second coming of Jesus. In the letters from the Apostle Paul we can find him talking about this second coming. He thought it would be any day now and when it doesn’t, Paul has to change his sermons a little.

So, as we have discovered, the second coming of Jesus and/or the kingdom of God or the Judgement Day are all something that will happen in the future <sup>36</sup> “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only God knows.”

It’s sort of like babies who come whenever they decide. It’s not up to us to know, just be prepared and patient. Amen

#### **PASTORAL PRAYER:**

God of the unchanging and the unexpected, we are hard put to know what the day of the Lord is, let alone when it may come. Much of life seems cyclical, going around and around and not moving in any perceptible direction. Justice seems less like a

flowing river and more like a fountain that occasionally rises to great heights, only to subside again. Forgive us if we are more curious than concerned, more puzzled than prepared for your judgments whenever they come. Prepare us for the day of Christ's coming, in our death or in human history.

In the meantime, we are puzzled about the events in our world; war, devastation, poverty, hunger, and danger. We pray for all people who are sick, lonely, injured, mourning from lost of loved ones, and all those on our prayer list. The list of those who need our prayers continues to grow. We pray for all those around the world who need our concern.

Heavenly Parent, give us wisdom, and patience as we await your presence as we pray the prayer your son taught us. . .

#### **THE LORD'S PRAYER:**

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

#### **OFFERTORY INVITATION:**

How will our neighbors be prepared for times of crisis? Who will teach them where to find oil for their lamps? Who will help them discover spiritual riches more valuable than all their material possessions? When we give to our mission of the month, or some other disaster relief, our church is a resource, and our ministry is for the whole world. Let us give our support.

#### **\*UNISON OFFERTORY PRAYER:**

**We set our hope in you, God o all ages, and seek to serve you through our offerings and our efforts to encourage and equip one another for ministry. Help us decide daily to live according to your will, preparing ourselves for the opportunities and challenges you give us. May your rule shape our lives I ways that introduce many to the joys of eternity in the midst of time. Amen.**

#### **\*COMMISSION AND BLESSING:**

ONE: God expects our complete loyalty and devotion. God's love frees us for joyous living.

**MANY: We will serve the God we have met here.**

**We know that God goes with us everywhere.**

ONE: May worship continue wherever we go. May our service extend God's love to all we meet.

**MANY: We will consult God in our daily choices. We will respond to others in the spirit of Christ.**

ONE: God is faithful in covenant with us. The counsel of God is always available to us.

**MANY: We will take time to rest in God's promises. We will listen for God's word of hope.**

Amen. **Amen.**