

We love weddings – the excitement, the celebration, the chance to see loved ones and rejoice. We do things to get ready for a wedding, even getting fitted for a suit or a dress. Jesus uses the picture of a wedding and feast throughout Scripture to describe the great joyous event he has planned for believers of all time when he gathers us to heaven with him. Jesus speaks with great anticipation, but also warns and encourages us to be ready for that day right now lest we be found unprepared and miss the party not just for a day, but for eternity.

Go out to meet the bridegroom.

1) Be wise and prepared.

2) Live every day in anticipation of his great arrival.

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ “‘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.’ “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. “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

Jesus often refers to the “*kingdom of heaven*” or “*the kingdom of God.*” It is not referring to a physical kingdom, but Jesus’ gracious rule in our hearts by faith. Jesus describes his kingdom with a parable about virgins awaiting the wedding celebration like modern bridesmaids awaiting the arrival of the groom to start the party – “*Five of them were foolish and five were wise.*” All **Go out to meet the bridegroom.**

Jesus’ point is that he wants you to **be wise and prepared** for his final coming on the last day, to have him ruling in your heart now until the day he returns. He is the bridegroom. The party starts when he gets here. Do not be like the unwise and miss out. **Be wise and prepared.**

How can I be prepared for Jesus’, the Bridegroom’s, appearing on the last day? *The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.* What is this oil? It seems to be something that each one has access to, but some foolishly discard or ignore. *The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them.* Clearly, we don’t want to be found leaving this oil behind. It is the key to preparedness.

The oil to the lamp of the Christian’s heart is God’s grace to us through faith in Christ Jesus. How is faith created, sustained, fed, fanned into flame? It is only through the Gospel – the means that God the Holy Spirit has promised to use to bring dead human hearts to faith and spiritual life, to convert, to sustain, to strengthen. He uses the means of Grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. The Gospel is the good news that Jesus, our bridegroom, has given all – his life, suffered the hell we deserved, died in our place, and rose physically from the grave – so that we could have a place at the party, a seat at his banquet, - forgiven, washed clean in our baptisms, clothed in his righteousness – the only acceptable wedding clothes. He has promised to return to bring us to be with him forever.

He has given us the gospel, created faith, and given us His Holy Spirit. We utilize the means of grace. We bring our children to baptism, and remember our own and what it means each day that our first identity is as a child of God and then father, mother, child, employer/employee, student, etc. We come to the Lord’s Supper to receive Christ’s body and blood with the bread and wine and forgiveness won for us, strength to live in the grace God has for us and live for him, not for self or sin. We read his Word, we gather to praise God’s name and encourage one another as that day approaches. We listen to the sermon and the readings, not just to check a box or see if anything fits our fancy, but as it actually is – the life-giving word of God for us, and we apply it and live it. **Go out to meet the bridegroom. Be wise and prepared through Word and Sacraments.**

How do we discard the oil of God's grace and the faith we need? We do it when we forget our purpose and forget who we are. Professor August Pieper once wrote that it is the devil's trick to switch the price tags in the store of our life to make us think that the things that are really important or needful have the smallest price tag and aren't worth much, and that the insignificant or throw away things have a high price tag so they must be really expensive and thereby important. What is the price we are willing to pay? The currency is our time, our thoughts, the real estate of our hearts, our desires, our talents, our money, our focus. What are we spending these things on while we wait for Jesus to arrive? Are they affecting whether or not we care if Jesus ever comes? Are they affecting how I live my life – like I don't care what God commands, or about how God wants to direct my life? Do I say with my actions – God, could you just wait a second, I have this thing I want to do, or I'll do as I please, God, I'll consider you and your Word when I have time. Realize how foolish that is. To go on like this is to use up the little oil we have in our lamps not caring that we ran out because we are living our best life here, living only for this life. We'll be unprepared.

But you, Christian, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, **Live every day in anticipation of his great arrival.** Live *in* the world, but not *of* the world. This is hard because where we differ with the world we often have to suffer persecution, or at least tell ourselves “no,” to something our heart wants but God's Word tells us is not appropriate for us (John 15:18-21), because it drains the oil we need.

Rather, fill up on the oil of God's Word and Sacraments, his Grace, the faith he's given you, awaiting the call, “*Here's the Bridegroom, Come out to meet him!*” Let the flame of your faith glow brightly for the world to see as you by your humble service, your care for others, your turning away from temptation and fighting against the sins you struggle with, holding on to God's forgiveness and grace. Filled with the oil of God's grace, his forgiveness and love, you'll be a bright torch, welcoming the bridegroom.

When he gets here he will gather you into his banquet where it will be so unimaginably amazing. No more temptation. No more fear. No more distractions. No more discontentment. No more quarrels or hurt feelings. No feeling of inadequacy or disappointment – just the blessed smile of our God over us. We'll finally feel the happiness, joy and peace that this world promises but never gives. With Jesus we'll have it. Even now we can taste it as we are filled with the oil of God's grace and forgiveness.

This takes work and constant vigilance against our sinful nature's deceptive desires and the world's wandering ways, the devil's fiery darts. But it's worth it. Fueled by the oil of God's grace **Live each day in eager anticipation.** I've heard that when someone is going to be in a wedding, whether their own or a sibling's or friend's, they get fitted for a dress or suit and over the months before the wedding they try to lose weight or maintain. They want to be ready, fitting in their dress or suit. I think you all look handsome and beautiful, but I've heard that people do this. It takes work. Constant decisions each day – don't eat that, probably shouldn't go there because I'll be tempted, or that's good, but I can't have too much of it because it will throw my diet off track. Ok, I slipped up yesterday, but that's not a reason to abandon the diet. I'll take the time to go for a walk or run. I am going to be vigilant and work on my health. I want to be ready for that great and joyous event. What are we getting ready for? Heaven. The biggest celebration. You have the invite. The oil is here and running. And Jesus did everything needed for you. He didn't just fit into a suit, he fit this life perfectly. He lived each day with his eye on his Father and his will for him, never deviating once. He did it because he was preparing a place for you in heaven, and earning it for you. He gave up his life on the cross and rose again to secure our invite, and oil enough to be ready. Filled with the oil of his Gospel **Live every day in eager expectation of his great arrival.**

As a soldier stays ready each day prepared for what might come and ready for it mentally and physically, we also add spiritually as Christians as we await that glorious and joyous call, “*Here's the Bridegroom, Come out to meet him!*”

Keep Jesus first in your lives, in your relationships, in your work, in your friendships – keeping an eye on heaven as your hands set upon the work God has for you his child here, fueled and filled with the oil of his grace. **Live every day in eager expectation of his great arrival. Be prepared and wise - filled with oil. Go out to greet the bridegroom.** Amen.