November 11, 2026
Sermon Manuscript

Saint Matthias ANGLICAN CHURCH

Matthew 25:1-13 (NIV)

(Jesus said,) [1] "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. [2] Five of them were foolish and five were wise. [3] The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. [4] The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. [5] The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

[6] "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

[7] "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. [8] The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

[9] "'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.'

[10] "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.

[11] "Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!'

[12] "But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.'

[13] "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

There's Two Types of Failure

Today's parable - the Parable of the Ten Virgins or Bridesmaids - is from a section of Matthew's gospel that some refer to as the judgment parables - meaning the Final Judgment: the day when Jesus will return and we'll each stand before Him to give account. But five make it into the wedding banquet, and five do not. So, I don't know about you but whenever I hear this parable, there's a part of me that feels nervous. I get anxious and my mind can quickly go to, "Uh-oh, which ground of bridesmaids am I in (in this parable)? Do the five "Foolish Virgins" who fail at their responsibility point to some way that I am failing, which might therefore jeopardize me inheriting life after everlasting with God (after death)?

Now, maybe I'm the only one here who's had such doubts arise when encountering parables like this, but I sorta doubt it. So, what I want to say immediately here at the outset is that for those of us who are following Jesus, we can relax and breathe a sigh of relief. For any of us who have made it our aim to live for (and with) the Lord - however imperfectly; despite instances where we seriously fail to do so - this is not something Jesus wants us to be anxious about.

Instead, what I want to show today is that Jesus is warning here about a very different type of failure, one that goes to the core of one's understanding of what it means to be a Christian at all. The good news about this parable is that Jesus is not warning us about failing to be perfect, but about failing to make it our life's aim to live for Him at all.

Just last month, we looked at Jesus using the motif of a wedding in His parable of the Wedding Banquet.[1] And in our passage today, we see Jesus is drawing on this motif once again. So, in that October sermon, I explained how in Jesus' day, weddings were a big deal, that lasted an entire week. But today's parable only concerns the first day, where the festivities would begin with dancing for the unmarried women who'd been selected as bridesmaids. But the marriage ceremony itself - the nuptials - wouldn't occur until the evening, when at some point after dark a groomsman would announce with a cry that the groom was coming to retrieve his bride. And once the groom arrived at the home of the bride's family, his bride would emerge with her face veiled and the role of the bridesmaids was to process with lamps or torches, leading the processional and lighting the way for the bride & groom back to return to the groom's home for the ceremony.

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[1] Mt 22:1-14

But in this instance, the bridegroom is a long time in coming, so long that all ten (bridesmaids) fall asleep. And Jesus is surely hinting at how He wouldn't be returning in His disciples' lifetimes, like they might expect. But when it is announced that the bridegroom has *finally* arrived, only five of them have the oil in their lamps needed for the procession. These bridesmaids had one job, but the five Jesus labels as foolish have failed.

Now, in verse 8, the foolish ask the wise to share some of their oil, but they refuse. And to some this may sound stingy. But it would have been better to ensure there were at least five lamps burning well & bright all the way to the groom's home than to divide up their oil and risk having as many as ten lamps burning out mid-procession.

So, the parable ends with the five who'd lacked oil being left out of the wedding banquet. The bridegroom had chosen them for just one job: to honor him (and his bride) with the procession of lamps. And for the five wise, who make it into the banquet - despite all of the dancing and festivities and falling asleep - that task of honoring the groom had remained their chief concern. And Jesus' point with this parable is that He went to the cross to win us forgiveness and bring us into relationship with God, yes, but with a purpose: to make it our life's aim to honor Him and live into His intentions for our life (no matter how imperfectly).

Surely these ladies short-on-oil had been *delighted* to be selected as bridesmaids; it was a great honor! But what the wedding night reveals is that they seem to have given *little thought* to the responsibility of honoring the groom. In fact, the Greek word for "foolish" here can also be translated as "useless"; they prove useless as bridesmaids.[2] And *ultimately* it's their lack of concern for the bridegroom that renders each one of them as not only *useless* to Him, but to miss out on the feast where they would've been among the honored guests.

And so, with the bridegroom representing Jesus, He is making clear that we were saved for something… that our conversion or baptism is just meant to be a *start* to a life that seeks to be faithful to honor Him and His intentions for our life, which can all be summed up in the Two Greatest Commandments to love God and to love others as ourselves. What makes us Christians in the true sense of being Jesus's disciples[3] is when we have made this our chief concern, even though our success in doing so will vary, to say the least. #

When I was twelve, I was really into grunge rock music. And one of the bands I got into is called the Smashing Pumpkins. I can remember my sister had this boyfriend and one day I was riding around with them in his car and he was rocking - actually a *cassette tape* of - the Smashing Pumpkins' newly released double album. So I got into their music, and still jam out to some of their hits from time to time. But, the Smashing Pumpkins were not Christians; not that I really cared. However, in recent years their lead singer (Billy Corgan) seemed to have been moving toward religion that seemed at least Christian-ish. But it was only this week that my Youtube algorithm gave me a video from Billy's podcast last month where he tells another rockstar he's interviewing "I'm a Christian." But then he explains more clearly that he believes "in Jesus as my Lord and Savior."[4] [See QR Code.] Now, as a longtime fan of this guy, who on the biggest hit from that 1995 album had the line that "God is empty just like me," to become a Christian: it was honestly kindof emotional to me. I love when God gives us these glimpses that He is always at work (to bring people into His kingdom). But what stood out most to me is how he

[2] The same word used for salt that has lost its flavor in Matthew 5:13

[3] When the groom says to them in verse 12, "Truly I tell you, I don't know you," it didn't mean he literally didn't know them. Rather, this was an idiom rabbis would use in those days to permanently dismiss a student, perhaps when it was clear the student wasn't really submitting to the rabbi's authority. So this idiom meant "I don't want to have anything more to do with you."

[4] https://youtu.be/rra8irnCl1w?is=9flJH1Wn2-j4MNqh

succinctly defined what he understood being a Christian to mean: that Jesus is his Lord and Savior. What makes us like the five wise bridesmaids is when we have not just looked to Jesus for forgiveness, but making Him our Lord: where we have made it the aim of our life to honor Him and to follow His lead in our lives. [The good news about this parable is that Jesus is not warning us about failing to be perfect, but about failing to make it our life's aim to live for Him at all.]

And so, the primary question posed by this parable to each of us: is have we done this? Have you done this? Not how successful are we at it all the time, but have we made this our reason to be? And if you have, you can rest easy - like the five bridesmaids who were wise, you can sleep easy (and relax) - because you have the oil. The good news about this parable is that Jesus is not warning us about failing to be perfect, but about failing to make it our life's aim to live for Him at all.

So it is a failure to make him Lord at all that Jesus is warning against, not a failure to be perfectly faithful in loving God and others and ourselves. Truthfully, Jesus expects us to fail at love - he expects us to sin - *countless times* in our lives. But for those failures we has won us forgiveness. For those who trust in Him as both our savior *and* Lord, Jesus has brought us forgiveness of our sins past, present, and future. And a remarkable thing this gift of forgiveness does is it transforms our failures into opportunities for growth.

Do any of you here deal with a fear of failing? Any perfectionists in the room? I can struggle with this. And some can feel a burden of perfectionism from experiencing a fair bit of conditional love growing up: if love seemed contingent on how compliant and not a bother we were.

Others may feel a burden of religious perfectionism in particular from being in Church contexts that gave the impression God's love and acceptance was contingent upon us performing in certain ways. Perhaps some from Evangelicalism (Protestantism) got a sense that God's love was assured to those who read their Bible every day or shared their faith at every opportunity and avoided sex, drugs, & rock n roll. Perhaps for Roman Catholics it was that emphasis that Mass had better be attended every Sunday (come hell or high water) or maybe the constant threat that certain sins - that they call mortal sins - can forfeit one's salvation, or something else (I wasn't Roman Catholic).[5]

I don't know, but there are many powerful ways this feeling of conditional love can get in our bones and convince our hearts that - even despite our trust in what Jesus has done - our failures can bring God's hammer down. And yet, what does Paul write in Romans 8? He insists that "neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus *our Lord*"(v39). If we have made Christ our Lord, God's love is ours.

And what this truth of God's grace does is it completely changes the ballgame for when we *do* fail to love God or our others or ourselves (as He would have us). Of course there will be

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[5] Roman Catholic Doctrine on "Venial Sins":
Venial Sins are such sins as drunkenness, lying about something trivial, etc. Venial sin is a lesser sin against the Law of God, committed accidentally and/or without full consent of the will. Venial sins do not damn a person. But, they result in the loss of some justifying grace. If enough venial sin is committed it can lead to mortal sin and the loss of sanctifying grace (salvation). ...in the process of maintaining one's salvation, participation in the Eucharist (CCC 1416), having proper contrition (CCC 1452), and participating in penance (CCC 1468, 1496) are means by which the proper level of sanctifying grace is maintained so that salvation is not lost.

Roman Catholic Doctrine on "Mortal Sins":
Salvation, or the state of being in sanctifying grace (infused grace that makes a person holy and acceptable to God), can be entirely lost if Mortal Sin is committed. Mortal sins are extremely serious sins such as murder, adultery, homosexuality, etc. Mortal sin is a transgression of God's law that is willful, knowledgeable, and on purpose. Mortal sin results in the complete loss of all grace. The person's relationship with God is severed. Mortal sins damn a person. If the person dies in a state of mortal sin, he goes to hell and will never escape.
(CCC signifies references from the Catholic Catechism https://carm.org/roman-catholicism/maintaining-salvation-in-roman-catholicism/)

worldly consequences to our sin; and don't hear me as downplaying that: when we do wrong or fail to do what is loving, it can severely impact us and others. But because we have grace, because we have forgiveness and God's love for us does not hang in the balance, our failures also become opportunities for God to transform our character even more. Because, when we are confronted with the reality of our sin, we don't have to hide in shame; rather, we can go *to* the Lord and receive His forgiveness, but also ask Him to lead us toward healing and sanctifying that sin-sick part of our heart. And so, Jesus gives us the possibility of even our failures being made a gift.

Verses 2-4 of our passage from James this morning is just one instance where the New Testament talks about trials and tests of our faith and our faithfulness.[6] And the value of such tests is that God can use them to expose where He is at work still to purify our character. Though I should say: God doesn't need to test us. Life circumstances provide us with plenty of tests of our love for God and others.

Another person makes us mad, or does something we don't want, and we retaliate. Or we hide our anger - or aren't even really aware of it ourselves - and go and numb it out through some addictive behavior.

Anybody feel their love of God tested this week by politics? It's certainly not wrong to care about politics or to have an emotional reaction to an election of such consequence for so many people. But whether you liked the way it went or you didn't, it's so easy to cross that line into *functionally* trusting in Caesar - in political circumstances - more than God, whether we recognized it or not. #

There are all sorts of ways we can fail to love God and others and ourselves. Lately I've gotten back into practicing the Examen some at the end of the day, which includes reflecting first on positives, such as healthy and loving and constructive things I'd done that day. But then reflect on whether I was kind and loving *toward all* or any way I'd fallen short of God's commands, whether I was thinking of myself most of the time, or whether there's anyone I need to apologize to at the next opportunity. But whatever failures come to mind: I can certainly be grieved by them, but they are all under God's grace. 1 John says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." So we can be encouraged that if God's making us aware of our sin, then He is at work to lead us into transformation.

The good news is that Jesus mercifully warns anyone who will listen about failing to live for Him - and really make Him our Lord - but when we have done that, even our failures are opportunities for transformation and to honor Him even more.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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[6] James 1:2-4 - *² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*