

Pentecost Last
November 9, 2008

“Everday Faith”

Text: Matthew 25:1-13

There was a young man who worked in a local bakery during his high school years. One day he remembered a lady there answering the phone and coming back saying, “He’s coming!” Ladies ran for their hair nets, men for clean aprons and caps. The young man’s boss told him to sweep the floor, and cover all the containers. There was a wild, excited look in his eyes. Everyone was running around and he wondered, “Who’s coming?”

Suddenly through the front door entered a man in a suit with a case under his arm. The man walked around the bakery and checked for any health hazards. He turned out to be the state inspector for the Board of Health. After he left, everyone breathed a sigh of relief and went back to work. One of the ladies informed the young man that all the businesses in town watched out for each other. The first one to see the inspector coming would call the other businesses. They had a system of warning.

As the bridegroom in the parable, Jesus will return. When he does, there won’t be time for excuses for our lack of service or all the good we meant to do. The Apostle Paul reminds us, “So then each one of us shall give an account of himself before God.”(Romans 14:12) He is coming again. Like the wise virgins in our parable we will be prepared for his coming as we are ready in -

FAITHFUL PREPARATION

I. We Await Our Savior's Return With Joy
II. Our Faith Prepares Us For His Arrival

I.

A. The picture of Jesus return in our text is one of great celebration. It is that of a wedding where the bridal party would come to meet the groom and then go to his house for the wedding celebration which would last for several days.

The mood was indeed festive. The same picture is given to us of the return of our Savior as well. Like the bridegroom, he will take us to be with him forever. What greater celebration could we imagine? St. John says in Revelation, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready."(Revelation 19:7)

While we think of various judgment scenes, we need to remember that all we need has been provided by the groom himself our Savior Jesus Christ. His coming again is something we anticipate and which he has made ready with his own life.

B. In the ancient Jewish custom of marriage, a betrothal first took place. Parents arranged for the joining of husband and wife. After a short to medium length of time, the scenario of our parable would take place. The groom, with his companions, would come to meet the bride and the maidens who accompanied her and would return to his home, which would consummate the marriage.

Their weddings ordinarily took place at night, hence we have the need for the lamps filled with oil for the processional. Bridesmaids without oil in their lamps would

not be fitting for the processional and therefore not welcomed to the wedding feast.

Likewise Jesus comes to meet his bride, the church, for the great celebration of eternity. We live in a world filled with trouble and sadness. Illness, destruction and death are very much a part of our lives today. What a joy that will be to be escorted from this world and its problems to the eternal joys of heaven. I remember some years ago when there were all sorts of problems in our nation and the world that a woman in the Coal Valley congregation said to me, "Pastor, maybe the Lord will return soon." I was really struck with what she said, because that is our goal as God's children.

II.

A. Comments like this lady made are not often made because our feet are planted firmly in this world. Yet, Scripture reminds us, "We are in the world and not of the world." We tend to focus our thoughts too much here and not enough toward our heavenly home.

Perhaps that is the problem of the five foolish virgins in the parable. They were originally ready for the arrival of the bridegroom. They let their lamps run short of oil and when he arrived it was too late to go to the merchants who sold oil, for they had closed up shop for the day.

We become very much like them, when we concern ourselves with what is going on around us rather than our faith life. This reminds me of the man, who on occasion would pay a visit to his church. Not very often mind you, Christmas, Easter and other select occasions. One day, in his waning years, he wanted to visit it again. When he found it was no longer there he asked why. Someone told

him, “The church died, so they sold the building.” “What a shame,” he said, “they shouldn’t have left it die!”

We are alive and this congregation is alive as we are in the word and in worship. We are alive when we have concern for one another and for those who do not know the Savior. I read earlier this week in Portals of Prayer, that Christians in the infancy of the Christian church understood it was equally important for the church to train and equip its own members as well as those outside the church.

B. This was the emphasis of the recently completed Great Commission Convocation. If we are to reach others, we ourselves, our families and congregations must be filled so that we are strengthened to reach others. When we are filled with our faith, it only follows that we desire others to have that assurance as well.

I attended one session with a congregation much like our own. It had plateaued and realized that it needed to do something to change directions. The decision it made was to emphasize outreach. That has made all the difference in the life of that congregation.

What challenges are before us? Outreach? Building up the members of this congregation in Bible study? Making a concerted effort to ministering to the needs of one another? These are just a few thoughts. These are all important as we prepare to meet our Savior and have others ready to meet him as well. When we do, we can do it joyfully and hear him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant”(Matthew 25:21,23) Amen.