THE SERMON SUPPLY



A Resource from Region 6 ELCA

Lectionary 32, Year A

Pastor Alex Aviars, North/West Lower Michigan Synod
Director of Technology

Gospel Text – Matthew 25:1-13

Matthew 25:1-13

[Jesus said to the disciples:] [1] "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten young women took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. [2] Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. [3] When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, [4] but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. [5] As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. [6] But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Cout out to meet him.' [7] Then all those young women got up and trimmed their lamps. [8] The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' [9] But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' [10] And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. [11] Later the other young women came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' [12] But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' [13] Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

SERMON TEXT:

I love a good science fiction TV show or movie. I've noticed more and more that these sci-fi shows and movies have as plots where some type of supercomputer will categorize and track humans, in an effort to try to predict when a person is going to do something bad. One of my favorite sci-fi shows "Westworld" featured a plot line like this in one of its seasons. These movies and shows usually center around someone who this has happened to; and whether it is accurate or helpful. In this scenario is the computer correct? You can't know because the bad thing does in fact not happen. Often in these shows and movies, the supercomputer is destroyed, making everyone free to do whatever they wish. The humans are no longer categorized.

In our Gospel text for today, we have humans being categorized.

We have the bridesmaids who are categorized as wise,

and the bridesmaids who are categorized as foolish. Good things are said about the wise bridesmaids, and bad things are said about the foolish bridesmaids.

There are similarities between these two. Both have made some preparations.

Both take their lamps.

Both are waiting expectantly for the bridegroom.

When the bridegroom is delayed, both fall asleep.

By all outward appearances, the 2 groups are similar. You wouldn't be able to tell the 2 apart just by looking at them. In fact, we only know that they are in fact foolish and wise because Jesus tells us this.

Now if the bridegroom had arrived when he was supposed to, both sets of bridesmaids would get into the wedding, no problem. The plans that each had worked on would have worked. There would be no parable.

But, the bridegroom does not arrive when he is supposed to. The bridegroom is late.

This is where the differences begin.

It's at this point that the bridesmaids would need to put into action their backup plans. But only one set of bridesmaids has a backup plan. We are told these are the wise bridesmaids. They have an extra flask of oil for their lamps. The foolish bridesmaids did not plan ahead. Their oil has run out. In the end the wise bridesmaids enter the wedding banquet. The foolish ones do not.

A traditional reading of this parable puts the wedding banquet in heaven. The bridegroom is Jesus. The bridesmaids are all of us, waiting for Jesus to arrive. Those who plan ahead and are always ready for Jesus, get into heaven. Those who do not plan ahead and need more time to get ready for Jesus, do not get into heaven. The moral of the story is that we must always be ready for when Jesus returns, no matter what.

I would like to offer another interpretation. Rather than try to divide us into those who are wise and those who are foolish, I want to say that we as people, at different points in our life, can be like the wise bridesmaids, and at other points in our life, be like the foolish bridesmaids.

This parable then becomes not a single story where we play one role, and only one role, but a story that repeats over and over again, where sometimes we are like the good bridesmaids, and sometimes we are like the foolish ones. The wedding banquet then becomes not heaven, but whatever goal we were trying to achieve at any one time.

We are like the wise bridesmaids when we make preparations that will ensure our plans work out, well, according to plan. We buy health insurance in case we get sick. We buy car insurance in case we are in a crash. We save money. We budget. We make sure we get our assignments for class done when they are due. I have my sermon finished by Thursday.

But, sometimes our best laid plans go wrong. It's at this point that we can relate better to those foolish bridesmaids, because we have been in their shoes. An unexpected expense happens that doesn't fit into our budget and uses all of our savings. Our health insurance doesn't cover a surgery we need. We turn in an assignment for class late. I don't finish my sermon until Saturday night at 10pm.

Sometimes our best laid plans don't work out how we would want them to.

I can see hope in our Gospel text for today.

The hope in this story is what is not said. What is not said is a common punishment throughout the Gospel of Matthew. In 5 places throughout the Gospel of Matthew, the punishment is that a person is sent to be in a place where "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The Matthew author could have inserted that phrase at the end of this parable. But the author suspiciously does not. There is no final judgment here.

The text also does not say that the 5 foolish bridesmaids are forever locked out of the wedding. It simply says that the gatekeeper does not know them, at this point in time. Who is to say that they weren't allowed in later? Perhaps the 5 wise bridesmaids vouched for the 5 foolish ones. Perhaps the

gatekeeper changed his mind. I feel that the bridesmaid's stories must continue on past the end of this parable. Yes, we know that at this point of the story, the 5 foolish bridesmaids did not get into the wedding. But maybe later that night they do get in.

We are also in the middle of the Jesus story at this point. After this, Jesus is condemned to death on a cross, and that is carried out. Here again, if the story stopped the day after Jesus is crucified, it could be assumed that nothing more happened. But again, we know the rest of the story. Jesus rises from the dead.

And we further know the implications of Jesus rising from the dead. That out of death can come life. That even while we were foolish, Jesus saved us. And that that salvation can never be taken away.

Good people gathered here, we often like to try and categorize each other. This happens in our Gospel text for today as well. The bridesmaids are divided into the categories of wise and foolish. A traditional interpretation of this parable would be that we need to be like the wise bridesmaids, ready for when Jesus comes, and not like the foolish bridesmaids, who would not be ready for Jesus. I propose a different interpretation, where at various points in our lives we are both like the wise bridesmaids and the foolish bridesmaids. At some point all of us have been like those foolish bridesmaids. The Good News is that despite that, Jesus still came

and died for us. Despite all of the foolish things we do, our salvation is secure. All because of Jesus. [1 2]

Thanks be to God.
Amen.

Copyright © 2026 *The Sermon Supply*
This work is the intellectual property of clergy from the synods of Region 6 of the ELCA. It is provided for use by congregations within these synods for worship, study, and other ministry purposes.

This project is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).
This means:

- Congregations may use and share this material for non-commercial purposes, provided proper attribution is given to the *The Sermon Supply* and its contributors.
- The material may not be modified or adapted without explicit permission.
- Use beyond congregational purposes requires permission from the contributors.

For permissions beyond this license, please contact rwissler@neos-elca.org
License Details: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.