Text: Matthew 25:1-13

**Introduction**

After All Saints the church year takes a turn toward last things. And in this year where we read mostly from Matthew’s gospel, that turn is quite pronounced. Way back in the Spiring, after Easter when the altar went green and the lessons started reading through the gospel instead of keying to a holiday, we noted that the gospel according Matthew was organized around five sermons. The Sermon on the Mount starting with those beatitudes being the most familiar one. We spent some time on the missionary discourse when Jesus sends out the disciples, the parable sermon and the discourse on the church. But depending upon where you want to say it starts, the 5th sermon, the eschatological sermon – the one about end times and last things – might be the longest. It takes place in Holy Week. After the Palm procession ends at the Temple and Jesus’ cleanses it. Jesus returns to the temple grounds Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. And on his last day in the temple – because the last Supper takes up the next day – Jesus laments over Jerusalem – “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets…how often I would have gathered you…but your house is left to you desolate.”

And it is that lament that piques the interest of the disciples. Because as Jesus is turning and walking out of the temple, they stop him and point at the temple buildings. It is Mark who records their words, “teacher don’t you see such magnificent stones and marvelous buildings.” And Jesus replies, “not one stone will be left upon another.” Now imagine for a second if the guy you thought was the messiah pointed at the Washington Monument and the Capitol as he was leaving the National Mall and said, “not one stone will be left.” We’d all be overcome with anxiety at what was to come and some pressing questions. And that is exactly what the disciples do. “Tell us!” They demand. “When will these things be, and what will be the signs of the end of the age.” Because that is the only thing such destruction could mean, the end of the age. And that is what spurs Jesus’ final sermon.

**Text**

Keep those questions in your head: when and what will be the signs. Because at a very basic level that is what Jesus is answering. In chapter 24 of Matthew, Jesus answers those questions as directly as he can. When? “Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” What will be the signs? “It will be like the days of Noah. They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, right up until the day Noah entered the Ark.” The when is the most clear. You don’t know. If someone says they do, well, they must be better than even the Son. The signs? There is some wiggle room there. In the Days of Noah, Noah was of course building this gigantic ship in front of everyone. I’m sure that some people asked him, “hey, Noah, why are you building this?” And the logical answer is “a hard rain is coming.” Of course Jesus is building his church in front of everyone. The new temple of living stones is being built right now out in the open. The only people that responded to Noah’s preaching were his family – 8 souls in all. The word of God goes out and achieves that which it is sent to do. In Noah’s day, that was the flood, but God promised not to do that again. But in Noah’s day, even when the days grew nearer and animals started arriving two by two, it didn’t seem interesting. Things temporal continue right up until they give way to seem more important than things eternal.

Jesus has also already warned the disciples about understanding the sign of the fig tree he cursed, and he’s chastised the Jews about being able to read the weather, but not the times. What are the signs? The answer is both tougher and easier than we might think.

And this is where I think the parable today helps us. It is not a parable about the time. The bridegroom comes at midnight, so as late as possible, or as early as possible, depending upon your point of view. But what the parable does is portray a divide. All 10 virgins, bridesmaids, know that they have gone to meet the bridegroom. What is going to happen is clear. The bridegroom will come to get the bride. The cultural idea behind this is simple – the wedding has been set, all the negotiations between the families have happened, where the new couple will live has been readied, the feast and the wine and everything has been prepared. And the bridesmaids would gather with the bride to prepare for that moment when it starts.

**Christology**

This is the obvious point of the signs. Christ is the bridegroom and the church the bride. Christ has already paid the bride price and finished the negotiations. The invitations have all gone out. The wine is flowing, the fattened calf has been killed. The Word of the marriage has gone out the ends of the earth. Christ has gone to prepare a place for life together. And the day is soon.

And daily we live in the midst of various signs of this. Whether those signs are the sacramental – the foretaste of the feast to come – or promises given in the word preached – or more subtle signs like the various cursed fig trees and *memeto mori* we stumble across that whisper to us, not long now. We live in the midst of a world full of signs, that this world is groaning waiting for the revelation of the saints. That its time, or at least our time, is not long. Yet none of those things walk up to us and grab us. Life in this old world continues on. Obscuring the signs. Making us oblivious to them and our purpose.

**Moral**

And it continues on in such a way that the bridesmaids – those special guests that have been invited to attend with the bride - are divided. Five are wise and five are foolish. The wise bring oil for their lamps with them, while the foolish bring nothing.

Now this only matters because the bridegroom is delayed. We don’t know what time he comes. If he came in the morning or during the day, the oil and lamps wouldn’t be necessary. But we don’t know the time. That is the one thing that is unknown. That is the one thing that must be prepared for. That our time in this old world might go on.

We will all go through down seasons. All 10 became drowsy. Before that final trumpet, before the delay is over, most of us will probably sleep. All 10 slept. There is no shame in this. Because when the trumpet blows and the bridegroom comes. Everyone will hear it. Don’t worry about missing it. We might not know the time, but we won’t miss it. “Come out to meet him” will call everyone.

And we know this. We know we are being prepared for a wedding feast. We know we don’t know the time. We know that it might be dark and everything closed. The only question at that time that matters is have we heeded the signs. Have we prepared with the oil?

But hold on pastor, what is that oil? The simple answer and complex answer is everything that is part of the Christian life. Since you responded to the call, since you joined the bride to prepare for the bridegroom’s coming, have you prepared. Have you made diligent use of the means of grace – those great signs in our midst? Have you been constant in prayer? Have you adorned your life with good works and the fruits of the Spirit? Have you run the race and kept the faith?

Or have you gone about life in this old world as if this is the place that would never end? Ignoring all the signs along the way. Ignoring the market when it was open. Ignoring those things that you could do yourself. Becoming sleepy with the cares of the world. We know the bridegroom comes. Do we prepare to welcome, or have we invested ourselves in the world? Have we spent ourselves in things temporal, that we lose things eternal?

**Eschatological**

Because when the bridegroom comes and everyone wakes up, there is no sharing. Today we share one another’s burdens. Today is the day of grace. The food for the journey, the oil for the lamp, is available. It is available freely by the grace of God in Christ. Today we can build each other up. It is available dear in the love of the saints for each other. Today is the day of preparation. We can work while we have the light.

When we hear the shout, we have what we have. The wise will have prepared. The foolish will have not.

On that day we won’t be able to share and all the vendors will be closed because nobody can work when it is night. And that day comes for all of us.

When? We don’t know.

What will be the signs? They are all around you. Great and small. “Therefore watch.”

Watch and prepare, for tomorrow the bridegroom comes. And we don’t want to miss the feast. Amen.