

November 13, 2011
Saints Triumphant Sunday

"Saints of God Your Bridegroom Is on His Way"

MATTHEW 25:1-13

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.

Can't you hear them giggling and laughing? I am talking about those ten young girls who were asked to lead the bridegroom to the wedding celebration with his bride. They are dressed so nicely and they are holding olive oil lamps in their hands. They cannot wait to hear the shout from the wedding guests: "The bridegroom is here, let's all go out and greet him." As they wait patiently they giggle and laugh as all young girls do when they are really excited.

Can't you hear the giggling and the laughing? It is coming from Christians, saints of God washed clean by Jesus' blood. They are giggling and laughing for joy because the Holy Spirit, the wonderful Comforter, just reminded them that it won't be long before Jesus comes in clouds of glory to take us home to himself. In their most difficult moments of life they throw back their shoulders and they LOL- laugh out loud- they chortle with delight and they even giggle because they know that all their problems will suddenly disappear when Jesus returns in glory to take them home.

One of the reasons we gather together for worship each week is to help each other maintain our joy and excitement that Jesus is on his way to take us to the place he has prepared for us. I think of the words of Hebrews 10 that tell us, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another- and all the more as you see the Day approaching." God's Word reminds me. A Christian friend reminds me. My dear wife reminds me that Jesus could return at anytime. It fills me with joy just as it does you. It makes us want to laugh out loud with joy because it could happen at any time, even my lifetime. The wedding music is playing, the food is all ready, the people are celebrating and dancing, and the bridegroom is on his way. That's what Jesus wants us to remember at all times.

Are you excited?

Are you excited to know Jesus is coming back and it is going to be soon? Those girls were sure excited. "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom." These girls knew the bridegroom was coming to the marriage celebration, but they did not know when it would happen. We know that Jesus is going to return soon, but we do not know exactly when it will happen. He told us to look for signs such as earthquakes, famines, wars, rumors of war and false teaching in the church to remind us the end will be soon. Every news report of an earthquake, every soldier killed in battle, every child dying of starvation reminds us that the end is near. Before this day comes to an end you and I might be laughing out loud for joy. Jesus tells us: "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads for your redemption is drawing near."

Have you ever had butterflies in your stomach? Maybe you felt these butterflies in the stomach before the big game or when you had to sing a solo or when you were waiting to walk down the aisle on your wedding day. These girls were sure excited about holding the lamps for the bridegroom. If you knew Jesus were returning to us on clouds of glory today, think of the butterflies you would have in your stomach and the excitement you would share with your fellow Christians.

The excitement of that moment was brought out to us in our second reading for today. "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so shall we be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words." John tells us that we will "see him as he is." Mothers once brought their little children to Jesus so he could bless them. The day is coming soon when we will be so blessed just to be with Jesus as those children once were. Are you excited when you think about that day possibly happening even your life time or even tomorrow? Are you prepared to meet the Lord when he comes?

Are you prepared?

Ten girls were ready to meet the bridegroom. "Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but they did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps." I have tried to reconstruct from paper what these ancient lamps were like. They were like a flat tea pot. The wick came out of one end and the oil was put into the pot. To create a higher flame, you had to pull out more of the wick. It was important to bring extra oil, especially if the lamp was burning for a long time. Five of the girls brought extra jars of oil. They were prepared. Five of the girls did not bring the oil. They were foolish, they were not prepared.

The bridegroom took longer than expected. "The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep." Have you ever been to a wedding that was delayed? The bride took longer than expected to get dressed. It took longer to seat the guests than expected. The best man misplaced the wedding rings. Jesus is taking much longer than we ever expected. According to the words of 2 Peter there will be scoffers who

say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised. Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

An elder lady once told me that she heard the same warnings of judgment day when she was a child and she wondered why Jesus was not returning as they said he would. A man from Oakland even predicted this past year that Jesus would come on May 21 and then he changed it to October 21. Jesus is taking longer than expected to take us home. "There is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven." The Lord knows the hour of his return, but we don't.

The girls became drowsy and fell asleep. You don't hear them giggling and laughing do you. Some of them are snoring, not big snores, but dainty little snoring sounds are coming from some of them. Sleeping is good for us, but sleeping is also dangerous if we are driving a car. Sleeping would be especially dangerous if you were on guard during time of war. You may even set three alarms if you have to take an early flight out of Santa Barbara. Sometimes Christians fall asleep when it comes to thinking about Jesus' return. Romans 13:11 says "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."

What makes Christians so tired and sleepy that they stop thinking about Jesus' return and stop praying for his return? Jesus gives us part of the answer in Luke 21 when he says, "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap." It can happen that we start thinking so much about this life and what it offers us that we lose sight of the Lord's return. Look at your Bible. Are the pages worn and well used? God's Word will help you not be so caught up with this world and its problems that you forget about Jesus.

Suddenly the shout rings out. "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" All the people run out to the front where the bridegroom is coming with his wedding party. Where are the girls with the lamps? Hurry! Hold up your lamps. Trim the wicks and let them burn brightly. Escort the bridegroom to the wedding celebration. His bride is waiting for him.

The young women scramble. They grab for their lamps. They pull out the wicks so they burn even more brightly. There is hardly any oil left in the lamps. Five of the girls add oil from the extra oil that they brought with them. Five of them realize they didn't have enough oil in their lamps and so they plead for help: "Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out." The other girls cannot share because then they will not have enough. Foolishly the five run to buy oil, but it was too late. They came back and the door to the wedding celebration was shut. They cry out, "Sir! Sir! Open the door for us! Open the door!" The man keeping the door said, "I tell you the truth, I don't know you."

Why does Jesus delay his coming into this world? He delays his coming because he does not want to have to say to people "I don't know you." Jesus wants everyone to know him as their Lord and Savior. Before sending the great world flood, the Lord gave Noah 120 years of time to preach to people and warn them of the disaster that was on its ways. Finally the Lord God had to carry out what he promised. God shut the door of the great ark and destroyed the world with water. The day is coming when the Lord Jesus

will come in clouds of glory and destroy this world with fire. Before that time comes he is giving the people of this world an opportunity to believe in him and have their sins washed away by his blood so they can be saints, holy people, acceptable in his sight. He is giving us the blessing of faith and the blessing of baptism that connects us to his death and resurrection. 2 Peter says, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises, as some understand slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Jesus said, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." We don't know the hour that Jesus will return, but we do know what he has done to make us ready for that hour. A few months ago, the lady living next door to the church was in the hospital with cancer that was quickly claiming her life. I had the opportunity to visit her. Her first words to me after I said "hello" were, "I am thinking of the blood of Jesus that was poured out at the cross and how it has paid for all my sins." She did not have to pray to saints as her church taught. She was a saint washed pure and holy in Jesus' blood. Dear Christian you are a saint, you have been washed by Jesus' blood. You wear the robe of his righteousness. You are eagerly yearning and longing for his return. What's that sound I am hearing? Is it laughter? Is there giggling? These are not young girls are they? No they are grown men, and grown women and some little girls and some boys. They are telling each other with smiles on their faces and songs on their lips, "This may be the day that Jesus is coming to take us home." Amen.