

**Matthew 25:1-13**

Living in rural Missouri, drivers must be constantly aware of the bends and curves in the road ahead. When reading a newspaper account of a vehicle which ended up in the trees, it is often reported that “the driver failed to negotiate a curve in the road.” But we know better. Most likely the driver of that vehicle was being foolhardy, taking curves at a rate of speed much higher than what was posted. Even though the speed limit on a stretch of highway may be set at 55 mph, if the suggested speed for a curve in the road says “25,” it would be foolish to ignore that warning sign and keep your speed at 55. Yet, if you spend any amount of time on the road, you know that the highways are full of foolish drivers. And if people have no problem with taking chances on the roads, it stands to reason doesn't it, that people also have no problem with taking a chance on their eternal salvation?

You were given a lamp of faith in your baptism. On that day your parents or guardians promised to pay close attention to their God-given task of keeping your lamp filled with the oil of God's Word. On the day of your confirmation you made a solemn and sacred vow to live not as those who are foolish, but as those who are wise by never forsaking the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, and never neglecting the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood. You promised to continue storing up oil for your lamp not until you felt as though you had enough, but until the day you died. On the day of your confirmation you promised to slow down for the curves.

This was not a harsh law given to you. God does not follow you like a policeman waiting to pull you over if you exceed the limit by just one mile per hour. You promised, with joy, to worship God faithfully; to receive His flesh and blood often, to study His Word diligently, not because you had to, but because you desired to live wisely as His precious child. Out of love for God who loved you by giving His Son Jesus into death for you, you desired to drive through the remainder of your life not ignoring His warning signs, but carefully observing them.

What's happened since that day, the day of your solemn vow? Whether you drive Highway 94 fast or slow, do you as a baptized child of God regarding your lamp of faith, live with the wise or with the foolish? Today you slowed down for the curve. You are wise for being here. You heeded God's sign. What about next Sunday? Will you slow down for that curve in the road as well, or will you speed through that curve by neglecting the hearing and receiving of Christ's Word and Sacrament? The curves in life never stop coming. Some of you have made it a wonderful habit of always slowing down for the curves. You live wisely by taking the time regularly to come to the House of the Lord and store up the oil of God's Word for your lamp. Others of us may slow down for a curve one Sunday a month, but speed right through the rest of the curves. And still others never slow down at all. They have the habit of speeding through every curve. They never come to God's House to store up oil for their lamp. They ignore each and every warning sign from God.

God does not want you to end up crashing in the trees. He does not want you to find heaven's door shut; and He today gives to us this parable of the Ten Virgins out of pure love and mercy so that through these words of Christ He may work repentance and faith in our hearts.

These Ten Virgins represent all Christians. It's not that the five wise are the believers and the five foolish are the unbelievers. All ten had lamps of faith. All ten were waiting for the Bridegroom. This parable does not mention anywhere the heathen unbelievers who live in wickedness. You and I are the Ten Virgins. Your ungodly neighbor who does not even know the Lord is not included in this parable of Jesus.

So what does this mean? It means that of those who are on the rolls of the Christian church today, there are those who are wise and there are those who are foolish. There are those who regularly slow down for the curves, and there are those who do not.

What does Jesus say about the five foolish virgins? He does not say that they were mean and nasty and always cursing and swearing. These five may have been just as nice, or nicer, than the five wise virgins. The foolish virgins had lamps of faith. They were baptized Christians. They went to church and Sunday School. They knew the Lord Jesus—they recognized Him at the door—"Lord, Lord, open to us!" they cried.

What made them foolish? At some point in their life they stopped slowing down for the curves. They began to live foolishly by paying no attention to God's warning signs. They slowly, at first, then surely stopped coming to the House of the Lord to store up oil for their lamps. Christians who are foolish believe that their lamps will burn without oil. Wise Christians realize that lamps need oil to burn. The foolish say to themselves, "My lamp is burning okay now; I don't need any more oil than what I have." The wise keep themselves in God's Word and Sacraments. They know that although their lamp is burning now, it will not continue to burn without the oil of the Word of God. They, unlike the foolish therefore, faithfully study that Word; they faithfully hear that Word when it is preached and taught; and they faithfully receive that Word in the Flesh at God's altar.

It doesn't matter if we have faith if we're not fueling our faith with God's Word and Sacraments. A lamp is worthless without oil, and our faith is worthless unless the oil of the Word is in plenteous supply. It doesn't matter if we know Jesus if He doesn't know us. "I do not know you," He told the five foolish virgins and shut heaven's door to them. "But we have lamps!" they might have cried; "We have faith; open up to us!" Faith is not faith without the oil of God's Word.

Do not ever deceive yourself by thinking, "I'm okay, I have faith." Your faith and mine will go out again and again. All ten virgins slept. Whether we're strong or weak Christians, faith goes out. We become drowsy. We grow weary of waiting for the coming of the Lord. It's not about your faith; it's about the oil of the Word of God. It's about God pouring the oil of His Word into your ears and giving you peace in the midst of trouble; comfort in the midst of fear; hope in the midst of despair. It's about Christ who gives you His sure and steady Word—a Word which will not go out even when our lamps of faith fail; a Word which gives life and salvation even though we deserve only death and hell.

Those five foolish virgins did not know they were foolish until after the Bridegroom came. Do not make that mistake. If you have been living foolishly; if you have been speeding through the curves and not slowing down to hear and receive God's Word and Sacraments week after week, humble yourself before God. He wants no foolish children in His family. He desires none to be shut out of heaven.

Don't look at your lamp; look at Christ and hear His Word of Grace to you: You are forgiven. Jesus hung on the cross for you. He died that you might live, and He lives now for you. Whether your lamp is burning brightly or not, look to your Savior. His Word to you will never change. He never grows weary of speaking to you His Word of Peace. He is the Bridegroom. His wedding feast is prepared for you. He made room for your sins on His cross, and He makes room for you at His Table.

Have you been speeding through the curves? Have you been ignoring God's warnings? Have you been living apart from the oil of the Word? There is no anger in God's heart toward you. Right here and now He gives you the oil of gladness—your sins are forgiven. Your God is for you. He will not turn His back on you. He will not ignore your cries for mercy. He will, through the oil of His Word coming now into your ears, cause you to live not as those who are foolish, but as those who are wise...so that on the day of His coming you may, together with all His saints, rejoice that heaven's door is, for Jesus' sake, open to you. Amen.