Sermon Aprop27 November 8, 2026
Joshua 24:1-3a,14-25, Psalm 79:1-7, 1Thessalonians 4:13-18, Matthew 25:1-13
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Lived Prepared.

In the name of God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

How differently would you live today if you knew Jesus Christ would meet you tomorrow?

That is the question beneath our assigned readings for today.

It is a deep question that goes beyond what we believe about the end of time when Jesus will meet us.

It invites us to think about how our faith informs the way we live right now,

in this moment.

Christ will come again, and he calls us to live faithfully prepared now as people already claimed by his kingdom.

In Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, we hear him trying to calm a frightened church.

The Christians in Thessalonica believed that Jesus would return soon.

And so, fearful and grief-filled questions arose among them:

What about those believers who had already died?

Had they somehow missed the promise? Had death overtaken them before Christ could return for them?

They were experiencing grief and fear.

It was the sorrow of a community watching the people they loved suffer and die, likely from persecution, and wondering whether death had somehow interrupted God's saving promise.

Paul addressed that fear and grief with hope. He writes,

"For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died."

In other words, we do not build our hope on our timetable.

We build our hope on Jesus Christ.

His eternal promise does not depend on whether someone dies before his return.

It rests on the truth that Jesus died and rose again.

Jesus is the source of our hope.

His death and resurrection form the foundation of our future.

Jesus lives, so those who die in him are not lost.

Jesus is risen, and death does not have the final word.

Jesus will come again, ensuring our fear and grief are never without hope.

Our assurance in Jesus' saving grace means we live with the conviction to share our faith not only in our words but also in our actions, especially when we think no one is watching.

Our scripture today holds together two truths that we often try to separate:

God's judgment is real, and

God's salvation in Jesus Christ is certain.

"God will save the righteous and punish the wicked no matter what their social or religious status or affiliation," and at the same time, "those who are in relationship with Jesus Christ need not fear God's judgment because of Christ's death and resurrection."[1]

We live with this holy tension. We are not meant to live in terror before God, nor are we meant to stroll carelessly through life as though our choices do not matter.

We live with reverence because God is holy, and with peace because God is merciful.

We live knowing that Jesus Christ is Judge, and we live trusting that Jesus Christ is also Savior.

That same tension appears in Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids in the Gospel.

All ten bridesmaids knew the bridegroom was coming.

All ten were invited.

All ten were waiting.

The difference was not that some had heard and others had not.

The difference was that some prepared for the long wait, while others did not.

Some lived in a way that matched their professed beliefs.

Others assumed that vague awareness was enough.

They expected the bridegroom but were not prepared.

And that may be the warning for us.

We know the words of faith, speak of Jesus Christ's coming, and recite the Creed, yet still live as though our daily tasks are the only thing that matters.

We believe in eternity but make decisions as though we believe otherwise.

[1] Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year A, Volume 3, p. 468.

How do we prepare?

How might we ensure we have enough oil in our lamps to see Jesus when he comes again?

Our preparation is often smaller than we may think.

Here are some everyday examples;

Preparation looks like a parking lot. You pull in and see a good parking space, but someone else is already trying to turn into it.

You know you can beat them to it because you have the better angle over the other car.

You could slip right into the spot and not think about it again.

You could say to yourself, hey, I got there first!

But the kingdom of God asks,

“How do I love my neighbor here?” Preparation for Christ looks like yielding the space and finding another one.

Preparation is like going for a walk and seeing a rock or a stick on the sidewalk. You could step over it and move on.

But you think about whether the next person will see it.

Maybe it will be someone older who might stumble.

Maybe a child will fall.

So, you stop and move it out of the way. That tiny act will never make the news.

No one will applaud.

But it is a form of kingdom living.

It is one small way of saying:

I will not only think about my own path;

I will care about the next person's path too. And the love in our heart grows!

Preparation means picking up trash from the curb or sidewalk so it does not wash into storm drains, streams, and rivers.

That, too, is a form of discipleship, called creation care, neighborhood care, and care for those we will never meet.

Such acts do not earn salvation,

but they do train our hearts, minds, and souls.

They teach us to live not merely for what is easy now, but for what is good, beautiful, and faithful in God's sight.

Preparation looks like kindness in a cruel world.

I recently learned about the “Kindness Mob,” a group formed to respond with kindness to mean, hateful, and mocking comments on social media.

The founder of the Kindness Mob shares links to posts with hateful comments and invites followers to respond with kind, loving, and encouraging comments.

Every time we refuse contempt, mockery, and the cheap thrill of tearing someone down, and instead choose mercy, truth, and gentleness, the kingdom of God becomes a little more visible in this world.

Being prepared is practiced faithfulness that forms us into the kind of person whose daily habits are shaped by our relationship with Jesus Christ and whose life begins to reflect the kingdom we await.

Another, more common way to understand the wise bridesmaids and their oil is to recall the story of the wise builder who built on rock rather than on sand.

A house on sand may look fine for a while. A shallow discipleship may seem sufficient for a time until the storm comes,

the delay stretches on,

suffering intrudes,

grief arrives, or

Jesus Christ asks of us more than we have prepared to give.

Our Christian life matures through our daily preparation.

The Scriptures we’ve heard teach us to live in the tension between holy fear and holy peace.

Holy fear, because God’s judgment is not imaginary and the moral shape of our lives matters.

Holy peace, because Jesus Christ has died, has risen, and will come again, and in him our hope is secure.

“Jesus’ death and resurrection assure us of our rising with Jesus into eternal life;

he is the means by which God achieves our salvation.

The fear and grief we feel in the present moment is covered by the comforting blanket of this Christian hope.”

We need to hear this because we all carry fear and grief.

Grief for those who have died.

Fear for the state of the world.

Fear and grief for cruelty that seems louder than kindness.

Grief for the Church's failures.

Fear of our own weariness.

And yet Christian hope does not deny any of that.

It does not tell us to pretend that everything is fine.

It tells us that fear and grief do not get the final word.

Jesus Christ does.

So how do we live while we wait?

We now live as citizens of the kingdom that has already begun in Christ and is not yet complete.

We live as people who have already experienced the Kingdom's reality and await its fulfillment.

We live with mercy, truth, patience, and generosity.

We live by habits that prepare our hearts, minds, and souls to meet Jesus with joy.

This week, let's practice one deliberate act of kingdom preparation each day.

Let someone else go first.

Remove something dangerous from another person's path.

Pick up litter.

Offer kindness where others are unkind.

At the end of the day, ask yourself:

Did I live only for myself today, or did I live as someone who belongs to Jesus Christ?

Then we may say that Jesus' return is shaping our lives right now.

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Do not let fear and grief get the best of you.

And do not live carelessly.

Live prepared.
Live kindly.
Live faithfully.

Live now as citizens of the kingdom you are waiting to see.

Amen.