

Wise and Ready  
Matthew 25:1-13

Five wise virgins and five foolish virgins. As with many of Jesus' parables, something just doesn't seem right.

The prodigal son returns home and the father acts like nothing ever happened. This young man is showered with gifts while the dutiful older brother doesn't even get a goat to have a party with his friends. It just doesn't seem right.

The workers in the vineyard who worked only one hour got paid the same as those who worked all day. It just doesn't seem right.

Today the five wise virgins won't share with the five foolish ones. That's kind of stingy. That doesn't seem to be a very Christian or loving thing to do. But even more troubling are the words of the Bridegroom.

In the parable of the prodigal son we are shown a loving and forgiving father. In the parable of the workers in the vineyard it is the generosity of the owner that catches us off guard – giving full pay to those who worked only an hour. But today, the five foolish virgins come back and say, *“Lord, lord, open to us.”* But he answered, *“Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.”*

I'm not sure we like this Jesus. What has happened to the loving and forgiving? Where has the generosity gone? *“Lord, lord, open to us.”* “Too late. Get lost.”

And truly they are lost ... for eternity. What happened to the nice Jesus?

Five and five; half of you get to be wise the other half foolish. I think I'll include my wife in the wise half. This half spends seven hours a day five days a week for twelve years to prepare for college and a career. You spend eight hours a day five days a week for thirty years to prepare for retirement.

But how much time do you spend getting ready for eternity? Three hours a week? One in worship, one in Sunday school and another in a midweek study or personal devotion? Or is it a little less than that? Just two hours a week because Sunday morning is it? Or is it less than that because you can't drag yourself here for Sunday school. Or is it even less than that because you can't even manage to get to church every Sunday? Pretty foolish.

It's no wonder you want the nice Jesus! He can be found, but once the door is shut, that's it. The foolish are left outside the kingdom of heaven.

The wise thing is to be ready when the Bridegroom comes, isn't it?

Our puppy, Ruby, wants very much to please us. She wants to hear us say, “Good girl,” and to pet as much of her wiggling body as we can. But there are so many distractions. It's so tempting to run off down the street

to say hi to a friend who's out for a walk. It's so hard not to jump up on every adoring fan.

We can imagine ourselves as that puppy. We want to follow our Lord. There are times when we do so with great desire and devotion. But then we get distracted by our career, family, sports and other hobbies – good things, but things that can cause us to ignore our relationship with God.

And not all things that distract us are good. We harbor anger, succumb to lust, give in to greed, and pursue all sorts of selfishness... It doesn't take much reflection on our thoughts, words and deeds to recognize how foolish we have been. We need that nice Jesus.

The beginning of the good news is that you are not dead. The door is not yet shut. The fact that you repent of your sins is a sign that you are wise – that there is oil in your lamp. And the oil in your lamp has never been a matter of your own doing.

The words of the explanation of the Creed are clear: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

You are not dead yet. The door is not yet shut. As one who confesses Jesus Christ as Lord, you are one of the

wise virgins. You have a lamp; you have oil. They are gifts to you through the Holy Spirit. You need not live your life in fear of the coming of the Bridegroom.

The promised coming of the Bridegroom is our joy. The focus is on Him. He empowers us to concentrate. He opens our ears. He teaches us to listen and understand His Word, and to live in it. His cross empowers us to live in His Word, never assuming that we have heard enough. He makes us a wise virgin who lives His Word in our thoughts, in our confession and conversation, and in our good works. The Gospel message of Jesus Christ fills our lamps with oil.

We look to His cross and see that He has taken our sin and death upon Himself and won the victory over them. Jesus takes away our sin and fills our lamps with oil. We are ready to greet the Bridegroom. Jesus Himself has made us ready and keeps us ready.

And so, we keep watch. Jesus, the Bridegroom, will come soon. When He comes He will say, "Come in with me, my ready bride, my wise virgin, to my wedding banquet. Enjoy my love for you forever." You are ready.  
Amen