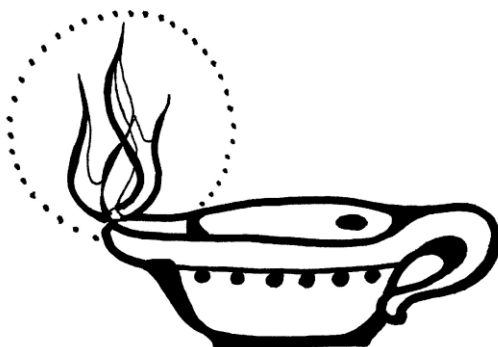


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Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost
November 12, 2023
ELW Holy Communion, Setting Eight

Today the prophet Amos calls for justice to roll down like waters. Paul urges us to encourage one another with the promised coming of the Lord. Jesus tells the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids. Surrounded by the faithful of every time and place, we celebrate Christ's coming in our midst in the word of life and the feast of victory—the marriage feast of the lamb.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping on-line with us today! Here at Grace Lutheran we believe God is active in your life. Even you being here now is testament of God's calling and leading in your heart, which you have faithfully heeded. So we welcome you, and pray that today you will be nurtured and that the gifts that God has graciously given you will be stirred for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Grace Lutheran worships, prays, and serves on the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the hən̓q̓əmiñəŋ̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather to worship our Lord, whose wisdom and laws we have a sincere desire and love for. For the salvation of our God comes from this wisdom, welcoming us all with a grace and peace that surpasses understanding. So we are drawn near to our God, entering the kingdom with compassion, faith, and love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

GATHERING SONG: Build Us Up, Lord (#670)

GREETING

The welcoming grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the compassionate love of God, and the whole fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

CANTICLE OF PRAISE (p. 185)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Great and loving God, your wisdom is radiant and unfading, giving discernment to our faith and purpose for our lives and service. May we see the welcome we share into your kingdom, that we might together work for justice and peace through the love and grace of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16

A reading from Wisdom of Solomon.

Wisdom is part of the structure of the universe and is easily accessible to those who want to find her. Wisdom actually seeks people out. People who are wise are free from care.

¹²Wisdom is radiant and unfading,

and she is easily discerned by those who love her,

and is found by those who seek her.

¹³She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her.

¹⁴One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty,

for she will be found sitting at the gate.

¹⁵To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding,

and one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care,

¹⁶because she goes about seeking those worthy of her,

and she graciously appears to them in their paths,

and meets them in every thought.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Wisdom of Solomon 6:17-20

¹⁷The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction,
and concern for instruction is love of wisdom,

¹⁸**and love of wisdom is the keeping of wise laws,**

and giving heed to wise laws is assurance of immortality,

¹⁹and immortality brings one near to God;

²⁰so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom.

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

A reading from 1 Thessalonians.

Some of the Thessalonians are worried that dead Christians will be excluded from the resurrection to eternal life when Christ comes again. Paul reassures them with the word of hope that all Christians, living or dead, will be raised into everlasting life with Christ.

¹³We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 188)

GOSPEL: Matthew 25:1-13

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus tells a parable about his own second coming, emphasizing the need for readiness at all times.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' ⁷Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' ¹⁰And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹²But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' ¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

O Lord, send your Spirit into this place to fan the flames of our desire for your Word and wisdom that awakens us for the joy of your presence through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Anyone here like math? I totally didn't when I was growing up, probably because I wasn't very good at it. I'd try, but throughout my elementary school years, it was always a struggle. And I remember it wasn't much of a picnic for most of high school either, as I didn't really care to learn the concepts and the rules, and I continually received poor grades.

I guess I didn't care because math doesn't matter all that much, right? Unless I became an accountant or banker or a mathematician for some strange reason, I don't really need these math skills, do I? I know, some of you engineers, scientists, and teachers might be shaking your head at me, as you probably know that math is more about just the numbers.

I learned what you might be thinking about math when I was in around grade 10 or 11, when I was complaining out loud about this exact thing about math, saying that we don't really need it unless you're going into a specific occupation that uses math. And a friend of mine who actually ended up being a teacher said that the point of math isn't just to teach us how to work with the numbers, but it's to teach us how to problem solve. Gives us tools for logic. Hones our ability to size up the situation and figure out what needs to be done.

And a light bulb went off in my head.

Because while it's true that I didn't really like the numbers at that point in my life, mostly because they tormented me with their different rules and properties and operations, but I did enjoy puzzles, riddles, and using logic to figure things out. Really enjoyed it, in fact. And I'll admit that I was, at that point, already pretty good at problem solving, maybe because I just had a lot of problems. But either case, after my friend said that, I had a whole new outlook on math. I still didn't get the best of grades but I did start to enjoy math, the logic of it all, and just trying to figure out its riddle.

Because math wasn't about the numbers anymore. It wasn't about understanding the terms. It wasn't about knowing the difference between a factor and a factorial or if there even is a difference. But it became about the process. About the journey. About the learning how to better problem solve. And that became the point of math for me. This point that I missed all along and pushed me in this place of strongly disliking math.

And so I wonder, how often do we miss the point on things throughout our lives? For us, is life about the destination or the journey? Is doing things about the accomplishment or the experience? Or, as we alluded to a bit a couple weeks ago, is our worship about the traditions and customs, or is it about the enriching and betterment of ourselves?

Looking at this parable that we get for today, I wonder if we miss the point of what is going on here in the story. I mean, this is another difficult to understand parable, because it doesn't really jive with our grace-centered Lutheran theology. How the story unfolds seems unfair, unforgiving, unfaltering around rules, regulations, and restrictions.

I mean we have these 5 out of 10 bridesmaids that flip because their oil in their lamps ran out while they were asleep, waiting for this super late bridegroom. We don't know why it's so important that their lamps are lit when he gets there, as we have no record of this custom so we don't even know if ever even existed. But those 5 oil-less ladies as the other 5 oil-full if they could borrow some, but when they are denied they get so desperate and run out to find some

24-hour oil vendor to stock back up. And in an almost hilarious rom-com sort of fashion, in their absence they completely miss the arrival of the bridegroom and are now disallowed to enter into the party.

So, yeah. We don't like this parable because it seems pretty unfair for those oil-deprived bridesmaids to not be allowed into the shindig because it's not their fault their oil ran out. Really, if the bridegroom showed up when he was supposed to, then all would have been fine. And it also seems unfair that those that were allowed into the hoopla aren't the nicest or most helpful kind of folk, rather they seemed to be unkind and almost vindictive. It doesn't seem like they should deserve to be there.

And there's the bridegroom... oh this bridegroom. Why is he so mean? Cut them some slack, they went and got oil for your party, sheesh. So they were a few minutes late, they just waited for your sorry butt for a whole lamp's worth of burning oil for crying out loud. It just doesn't sound right. It doesn't sound at all gracious. And much like the other parables we talked about in the past few weeks, it doesn't sound like the kingdom.

But maybe... maybe when we read the parable like this, we're missing the point. Maybe we're focussed too much on the careless attitude of the oil-free, the cold demeanor of the oil-some, and the lack of any sense of time of the bridegroom, when really we should be focussing on the story itself, what lesson it could be teaching us, and how it relates to our lives now, their lives then, and throughout this unending journey of faith.

So what could the point be, you ask? Well, I wonder if the point is... actually missing the point. Not that the point of the story misses the point, but the point of the story is about us missing the point, just to make that clear as mud. I wonder if through all the distractions of the story, the different nuances in the conflicting personalities, the discouraging tone of everything that happens, that the point of the story is actually that there is a party. A joyous occasion that involves bridesmaids and bridegrooms and lamps. There is a reason to celebrate.

But then that reason was superseded by this need to have oil in their lamps. The undocumented and probably nonsensical traditions and customs became the focus over the party. Those 5 ladies were distracted by what they thought was important that they missed the point completely.

See just as I missed the point of math for much of my life, let us not miss the point of our community, worship, and lives. It isn't to be so prepared that we cannot be caught off guard. The point isn't to have everything perfect and running smoothly without the need of forgiveness. The point apparently isn't even to be nice or on time. But the point is to show up. Show up as you are, ready to accept the graciousness of the host. Show up full of your good and bad and see the true welcome into the kingdom. Show up, whatever you might be going through, and be ready to party.

You see, we often get caught up in our to-do lists and responsibilities. We get concerned with our performance in what we do and the grade that we might get. We worry that we don't have our affairs in order enough to be welcomed at the party. So much so that we might forget to show up, be present, and open to seeing God in the world, filling it with a love and peace that surpasses understanding.

I get it though, for many of us, showing up *is* about keeping the customs and traditions and rules, and there's nothing wrong with that. But the problem comes when we miss the point of those customs and traditions and rules, thinking that they somehow take place of our reason to celebrate, our reason to worship, our reason to party. That reason being the love and grace of God shown to us, just as we are, sin and blemishes and all.

My friends, we are welcomed to this party. We have been invited regardless of our attitude, our demeanor, and the amount of oil in our lamps. We are welcomed even if we might not be prepared or ready or have kept up with all the rules that we might think we need to keep. But for us to fully recognise the party that is going on, we need to show up. We need to be aware of our position as God's people, our identity as God's beloved, our regard as God's redeemed, forgiven, and saved. That is the point of our community, our church, our very lives. To be in relationship with God and each other, together living in the wisdom of God that is full of grace and mercy and love and welcome.

So as we look ahead to the coming new church year starting with Advent that leads us to Christmas, let us not miss the reason for the festivities, the wisdom behind the invitation and welcome, the point of the party to which we all belong and only requires us to show up. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Rise, Shine, You People! (#665)

CREED

Together with our siblings in faith, let us confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**
**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**
**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Given discerning wisdom for life, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "by your unending mercy, O Lord," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. By your unending mercy, O Lord, **hear our prayer**.

O God, your wisdom is the source of life and you guide us in our community and throughout your kingdom. May our ministry reflect your wisdom, that your grace and love be seen and felt by all. We lift up in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; those who use our building for worship, work, and play; our partners Anglican Church of Canada and Moravian Church in Canada; and our bishops, rostered leaders, congregations, and ministries of the ELCIC. In particular, we pray for Grace Lutheran Church in Victoria and the pastors and leaders that serve them; and for Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Surrey and their pastor Lori-Anne Boutin-Crawford. By your unending mercy, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

O God, we love your wisdom as displayed in the order of creation and the circle of life. May we always be mindful of the connection we share with all living things, that our stewardship be responsible and considerate to the future generations. By your unending mercy, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

O God, your wisdom is also seen in your laws of grace and forgiveness, and you teach us how to live with each other in harmony. We pray for the nations of the world and all areas that face war, violence, and political turmoil, that our desire for peace always be at the forefront of our decision making. We also pray for the continued support of those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Abraham Barhane; and Solyana Amanuel; as well as for those that have not yet arrived: Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; and Filimon Abraha. By your unending mercy, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

O God, your wisdom is healing and restores us into eternal life with you. We pray for those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love and welcome shine on us all. Especially we pray for Bryan and Chona; the Prasad family; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and family; Beulah; Sukhwant; Cari; John; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Will; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Allen; Matt; Lucas; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...
By your unending mercy, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

O God, through your wisdom you welcome us into that eternal life with you and all the saints in your kingdom, where we all are included as the diverse body of Christ. May the lives of those that had come before us serve as a reminder of faith, love, and community, that we might be inspiring to those that come after us. By your unending mercy, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the wisdom of your grace and love, shown to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

MEAL

DIALOGUE

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should at all times and in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Savior Jesus Christ;
who leads us into inclusive welcome and wisdom,
that brings us to join with the choirs of angels,
the host of heaven,
and the church on earth
in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 190)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Holy and almighty God, by your wisdom you have created all that is around us. In your wisdom you have brought us up into new life. And through your wisdom you offer a salvation full of welcome and grace, bringing us together in your kingdom forever. And when the time was right. You send to us Jesus to further display this wisdom around your love and compassion.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, where he took some bread, gave thanks, broke and shared it saying, "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

And after they ate, he similarly took the common cup that they all shared, gave thanks, and passed it around the table for them to drink from saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

It is in this heavenly food that we can tangibly see, feel, and taste God's welcoming inclusion into the kingdom, moving us to proclaim this basis of our faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

So it is to you, O God, that all honour and glory belong, as you shine on us, save us, and lead us on your paths of righteousness and peace where we can see you face to face in the world and in our lives, through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into welcome and belonging by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those**

**who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Take and eat, God's welcoming wisdom for us all.
Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 191)
Blessed Assurance (#638)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, all thanks and praise to you, for you feed us with your wisdom and nourish us with your truth. Empower us as we go forth in the world, acting as your hands and feet and reflecting your love onto all that we meet, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May God, who creates, redeems, and sustains,
keep you fervent in faith, cheerful in hope,
passionate in justice, and overflowing in love,
and the blessing of God, Shepherd, Saviour, and Spirit,
be among you and remain with you, always. **Amen.**

SENDING SONG: Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer (#618)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, led by God in righteousness, faith, and wisdom.
Thanks be to God.