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FAITHFUL SERVANTS WAITING FOR THE SON OF MAN TO COMESermon for the 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, 2017

Matthew 24:36-25:30

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 24:36-25:30: <sup>36</sup> **“No one knows about that day and hour, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>37</sup> For the coming of the Son of Man will be like what happened in the days of Noah. <sup>38</sup> For in those days before the flood people were eating and drinking, and marrying and being married, until the day when Noah went into the ark. <sup>39</sup> They knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away. That is what the coming of the Son of Man will also be like. <sup>40</sup> At that time two men will be in the field. One will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding at the mill. One will be taken and the other left.**

<sup>42</sup> **“Therefore stay awake! For you do not know at which hour your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> However, be aware of this! If the householder had known at which time of the night the burglar was coming, he would have stayed awake, and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also, be ready! For the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him.**

<sup>45</sup> **“Who then is the faithful and prudent servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the right time? <sup>46</sup> Blessed is that servant whom his master finds doing this when he comes! <sup>47</sup> Truly, I tell you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. <sup>48</sup> However, if that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away for a long time,’ <sup>49</sup> and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with the drunkards, <sup>50</sup> the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not expecting him and at an hour of which he is not aware. <sup>51</sup> His master will cut him in two and assign his place with the hypocrites. There they will weep and gnash their teeth.**

<sup>1</sup> “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> For, when those who were foolish brought their lamps, they did not bring any olive-oil with them. <sup>4</sup> Those who were wise, however, brought olive-oil in their jars with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> When the bridegroom took a long time, they all became drowsy, and began to sleep. <sup>6</sup> At midnight there was a shout: ‘The bridegroom is here! Come out to meet him!’ <sup>7</sup> Then all those virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> Those who were foolish asked those who were wise, ‘Give us some of your olive-oil! For our lamps are going out.’ <sup>9</sup> However, those who were wise answered, ‘No, otherwise there will certainly not be enough for us and for you. Rather, go to those who sell oil, and buy some for yourselves!’ <sup>10</sup> While they were going away to buy it, the bridegroom came. The ones who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. <sup>11</sup> Later the other virgins also came and said, ‘Lord, lord, open the door for us!’ <sup>12</sup> However, he answered them, ‘Truly, I tell you, I do not know you.’

<sup>13</sup> “Therefore stay awake! For you do not know the day or the hour.”

<sup>14</sup> “For it is like a man going on a journey. He called his servants and entrusted his property to them. <sup>15</sup> He gave one man five talents, another two talents, and another one talent, each according to his ability; and he immediately went on his journey. <sup>16</sup> The one who had received the five talents went and put them to work and gained five more. <sup>17</sup> In the same way the one who had received the two talents gained two more. <sup>18</sup> However, the one who had received the one talent went away, dug in the ground, and hid his master’s money. <sup>19</sup> After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> The one who had received the five talents came and brought five more talents. He said, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. Look! I have gained five more talents.’

<sup>21</sup> “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. I shall put you in charge of many things. Enter into your master’s joy!’

<sup>22</sup> “The one who had received the two talents came and said, ‘Master, you entrusted two talents to me. Look! I have gained two more talents.’

<sup>23</sup> “His master told him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. I shall put you in charge of many things. Enter into your master’s joy!’

<sup>24</sup> “When the one who had received the one talent also came, he said, ‘Master, I knew that you were a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown, and gathering from where you have not scattered. <sup>25</sup> I was afraid. So I went away and hid your talent in the ground. Look! Here you have what is yours.’

<sup>26</sup> “His master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! So did you know that I harvest where I have not sown, and gather from where I have not scattered? <sup>27</sup> Therefore you should have deposited my money with the bankers; and, when I returned, I would have received my own back with interest. <sup>28</sup> Therefore take the talent away from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents! <sup>29</sup> For everyone who has something will be given more, and he will have plenty. However, he who has nothing will have even what he has taken away from him. <sup>30</sup> So throw the useless servant out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!’”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We are living in perilous times. War could break out anytime on the Korean Peninsula, while here at home, society is on the verge of making a decision that will have lasting ramifications for our country. If same-sex unions become lawful, the floodgates will open. People may laugh at the suggestion, but you wait and see: paedophilia, polygamy, bestiality – in time all these will become legal. When this happens, and provided the Lord does not return in the meantime, for those Christians who are living at that time, it will be an extremely difficult period to live in. I fear that many will simply give up their faith altogether, preferring to accept what’s happening around them, rather than standing up for the truth, and warning others of what God says about such wicked behaviour. Even for us today, when we see the beginning of what

surely can be described as *an abomination that causes devastation*,<sup>1</sup> it is obvious that there is increasing hatred shown toward us.

To this I say, have no fear, because Jesus says that *“the one who endures to the end will be saved,”* (Matt. 24:13). In the face of severe troubles, people proclaiming the Gospel and people who believe should endure in their faith to the end and be saved. Even when the love of many grows cold toward you, endure in your faith. Jesus is coming again, and we know that *this momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen,* (2 Cor. 4:17-18). The wickedness in this world will not be forever. The Son of Man is coming, and will soon deal with His enemies.

While we patiently wait, how do we endure in faith and live? How do we continue in life while we wait for the Son of Man to come?

The disciples had asked Jesus: *“What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”*<sup>2</sup> Jesus begins His answer to the disciples’ question by reminding everyone, <sup>36</sup> **“No one knows about that day and hour, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”** The Son of God, according to His humanity, when He answered this question, renounced the right to this knowledge for the sake of men, lest they inquire after the day and the hour and give themselves over to false security. As man, Jesus did not know when the Last Day will dawn. As God, of course He knows. Yet the mystery of the God-man surpasses all understanding. Jesus is the One who will be coming back on the Last Day, but He does not know when that day will be. Instead of trying to figure out when it will happen, Jesus simply urges us to be ready.

Jesus had made it clear that there’s a time of waiting for His coming.

When talking about wars and rumours of wars, He said, *“See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.”*<sup>3</sup> And about nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom and famines and earthquakes, Jesus said, *“All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.”*<sup>4</sup> During those

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 11:31

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 24:3

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 24:6

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 24:8

events in human history, Jesus said, *“This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world . . . and then the end will come.”*<sup>5</sup>

The time of waiting for the Son of Man to come is so important that Jesus issues a series of commands for believers. Those commands describe what you will be doing while you wait. As you follow those commands, you will be one of the faithful servants doing what your Master wants you to do.

Jesus gives you your first command, referring to the situation at the time of Noah.

Jesus pointed out that many **knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away**. Those who were unaware just kept on **eating and drinking, and marrying and being married**, as if nothing significant was about to happen. By contrast, Noah was getting ready for his family to enter the ark. Jesus said it will be that way when the Son of Man comes; some people will be unaware and will keep on living as if He will not be coming and as if there will not be an end of this age.

When the flood came, there was a division between Noah’s family (all safe in the ark) and all the other people of his day (left to die). Similarly, when the Son of Man comes, there will be a sudden separation of people. Some will be taken to heaven, and some will be cast into hell. **“Therefore,”** Jesus commands, **“Stay awake! For you do not know at which hour your Lord is coming.”**

Your first command is to **“Stay awake!”** Your constant faith in Jesus is what it means to be awake and aware that the Son of Man will come at a time you do not know.

Moving on, and using the illustration of a burglar breaking into a man’s house during the night, Jesus issues a second command, building on His first command to “stay awake.”

The burglar would come at a time not expected. But if the **householder had known at which time of the night the burglar was coming, he would have stayed awake, and would not have allowed his house to be broken into**. **“Therefore,”** Jesus said, **“you also, be ready! For the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him.”**

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 24:14

Your second command is “**you also, be ready!**” Even though you don’t know when He’ll come, stay awake and be ready. Endure in your faith to the end, and you will be saved.

But Jesus doesn’t issue only commands. He also sends you invitations.

In the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews, the writer says, “*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,*” (10:25). Meeting together is one way that God works on your faith, inviting you to gather around Him. Believers need to gather together to be strengthened and to give strength. Believers go to the gatherings for worship and fellowship not just to gain for themselves but to give to others.

In our day of heightened hatred shown toward Christianity, we need to find ourselves in church (unless of course illness or old age etc. prevents us). There are too many today who can certainly come to church, but instead, really couldn’t be bothered. And they will come up with all kinds of weak excuses. “I’m too busy. I had a late night on the drink and now my head hurts. I have sporting events. I don’t like the pastor. I’m doing this, I’m doing that,” and on and on go the excuses. It never ceases to amaze me how people can find time to do everything else, but cannot find the time to spend an hour a week in church!

May the subtle error that believers don’t need the church, that they can find anything else to do on Sunday mornings, be laid to rest! Like blades of grass growing together, we need one another.

In God’s house is where you hear His Word, which declares to you Jesus’ death on the cross, His resurrection, the love and forgiveness He has for you, that which has made you a faithful servant, that which has saved you. This now leads us to a specific characteristic of believers.

Jesus asks, “<sup>45</sup> **Who then is the faithful and prudent servant?**” And then guides us to the answer by using an illustration of a master who is gone for a while.

While he’s gone, this master puts a servant in charge of giving food to the other servants in his household. This servant, Jesus says, is giving them **their food at the right time**.

These words from Jesus were addressed first of all to the disciples. So it is not surprising that many commentators have seen this parable as being addressed to the ministers of the church, as almost an ordination sermon. We think of the importance of Jesus' charge to Peter, "*Feed my sheep*," (John 21:17). Anyhow, the master could easily represent Jesus; the servant in charge of feeding the others could stand for Christian leaders; and the other servants the rest of the Christians. Jesus says the way to be ready for the Last Day is not to concentrate on the sky but to feed those whom God has placed under their care. As things get worse in our society, and the world over, the most comforting place for the faithful children of God to be is in His house, where His called ministers of the Gospel nourish them with the Word of God. As Psalm 42:2 says, "*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*" Of this Psalm Luther said, "*The psalmist desires to come to God's house and be comforted by the face of God.... For God's house is that place where God's Word is, and God's face is His presence, through which He makes Himself known and by means of His Word, reveals His grace.*"<sup>6</sup>

However, there is a contrast. **If that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away for a long time,'<sup>49</sup> and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with the drunkards,<sup>50</sup> the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not expecting him and at an hour of which he is not aware.<sup>51</sup> His master will cut him in two and assign his place with the hypocrites. There they will weep and gnash their teeth.**

Sadly, there are false teachers, and many do lead people astray with their false teaching and ungodly behaviour. The wicked servant's monstrous behaviour flows from his sense that his master is not returning. Frivolously, exultingly, he says in his heart: "There is no danger, the master is slow with his coming!" This kind of thinking proves that the servant's work is mere eye-service. And this is borne out by his behaviour: playing the tyrant in beating his fellow-servants, especially such as are anxious to do their duty, and indulging to excess in eating and drinking with such as are willing to join him in his corruption. Here the unexpected arrival of the master brings the curse

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<sup>6</sup> Cameron, Bruce A., trans. Psalms with Introductions by Martin Luther. St. Louis: Concordia, 1993.

and punishment, an unmerciful thrashing and an assigning to the lot of the hypocrites, the dungeon with a remorse of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The same doom awaits any false Christian that abuses the trust of his Lord Jesus Christ, delays true repentance, is unmerciful in his dealings with others, joins with the children of the world in all the lusts and vices of the flesh, and tries to console himself with the thought: The Day of Judgment is not yet coming.

While the Lord rewards His faithful servants with the fulness of His heavenly blessings and all the riches of the mansions above, the false servants will be doomed to everlasting torment in hell.

The suddenness of Christ's second coming, along with His promise that faithfulness will be richly rewarded, moves us to watch eagerly for Jesus, and this brings us to our next parable. And again, Jesus issues a command.

In the parable of the ten virgins, five of the virgins were wise. They were especially farsighted; they had enough oil for their lamps, even some in reserve. Five were foolish, who did not think their task through to the end. All ten were waiting for the bridegroom to come. He was delayed and arrived at midnight. The five wise, farsighted virgins were ready and went in to the marriage feast with the bridegroom. By contrast, the other five had to go and buy more oil. While they were gone, the bridegroom came and the wise virgins went in with him **and the door was shut.** Left out! Even when they begged to go in, "**Lord, lord, open the door for us,** what they heard was, "**I do not know you.**"

This time Jesus draws the conclusion for you; His command is "**Therefore stay awake.**" And the reason is the same as before: "**For you do not know the day or the hour.**" Endure in your faith to the end and you will be saved.

It's far too easy to be foolish about your waiting. But Jesus gives you again this morning, exactly what you need to be wise. The feast Jesus prepares at this altar is a foretaste of the marriage feast He talked about in the parable. At this altar He gives what you need to be awake, ready, and watchful: "*Take, eat.*" "*Drink of it... for this is My blood.*" The life of Jesus Himself that is in the body and blood is life for you, making you a faithful and wise servant while you wait for His coming.



Jesus continues to further describe the faithful servants who are waiting for their master to return in the parable of the talents.

In this, Jesus describes the result of being a faithful servant. He tells the parable in three scenes. In the first scene, a man - later called "**the master**" - entrusts large sums of money to three servants. To each of the three servants, he gives varying numbers of talents, a unit of coinage. Each coin is valued at about twenty years' wages for common labour. To one servant he gives five talents; to the second he gives two talents; and to a third, one talent, each according to his ability. Then the man went away. Do you see the pattern in these accounts? Someone will come back. And a master entrusts servants to be faithful in carrying out tasks while he is away.

In the second scene of the parable comes the report of what each servant did with his coins. The first two have doubled their money: five turned into ten and two turned into four. The third hid his coin.

As the curtain comes up on the third scene, **after a long time** the master came, and the three servants are giving reports to him. The third servant hid his coin and wanted to return it. But the master calls him a "**wicked and lazy servant**," giving the command to "**throw the useless servant out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!**"

To the two who doubled their coins, the master says, "**Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. I shall put you in charge of many things. Enter into your master's joy!**"

Jesus has told us He is coming again. He has also told us that the one who endures to the end will be saved. Therefore, be constant in your faith, strong in your confession, trusting solely in Jesus, and you will **enter into your master's joy!** That's heaven. "*Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life,*" He says (Rev. 2:10).

Someone has said, "God's work here on earth doesn't pay very much, but the retirement benefits are heavenly." As you endure to the end, the Master will say to you, "**Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful... Enter into your master's joy!**"

After Jesus finished all His sayings, He told His disciples, “*The Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.*”<sup>7</sup> He endured to the end, the cross and the grave. He was wise for your sake, farsighted, seeing beyond the grave to the resurrection, to the ascension, and to His ruling in heaven. Therefore, God counts you as wise, as faithful, as ones who will live beyond the grave, who will join Him in heaven.

As the world around us falls apart, now, more than ever, we must “*hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful,*” (Heb. 10:23). We do not know when Jesus will come again, but hopefully, it isn’t too far away. In the meantime, we unwaveringly continue to preach both God’s Law and Gospel to the world, warning of the dire consequences of anyone who rejects the Lord, and proclaiming His free forgiveness to those who repent. In doing so, if we are to suffer, so be it. We trust that as we wait for the Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, He will continue to keep us in His care. His salvation is coming close, and His righteousness will soon be revealed.<sup>8</sup> To Him be all glory! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Heavenly Father, we come before You in prayer and praise, confident that You will hear our cries; because You are full of compassion and pity, not easily angered, and show great love and faithfulness to every generation.

Bless the work of Your Holy Spirit among us through Your Word and Sacraments. Turn us away from sin in true repentance, and help us to look to Jesus for forgiveness and for daily grace to do what pleases You. Provide faithful preachers and teachers of Your truth in Your Church, and make Your people eager to hear and learn it. Fill us with love and trust in You. Save us in all the battles we must wage, and uphold us in all our needs.

Strengthen Christians throughout the world constantly to confess that Jesus is Lord, to Your glory. Empower them to proclaim that it is Jesus who rescues them from the punishment that they deserve for their sin. Give to each one of

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 26:2

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 56:1

us all those gifts of the Spirit that are necessary for our witness to Christ. Fill us all with wisdom and joy to use those gifts for the good of all. Enable the light of the Gospel to penetrate the darkness of this world, so that people everywhere may rejoice in Your salvation.

May this Your house always be a house of prayer. Cleanse it of all unrighteousness, that it may be a place where Your glory dwells, Your name is hallowed, and Your Word is taught faithfully.

Keep the nations of the earth in peace. Turn people's hearts everywhere away from war, terrorism, and other wickedness. We pray, in particular, for those who are our country's leaders. Grant that our liberties may be kept safe, our laws upheld, injustice suppressed, and lawlessness punished. Bless all honest and useful work in industry, agriculture, education, science, the professions, and the arts. If you give us prosperity, let us never forget You.

May the words of our Lord Jesus be treasured daily in our homes, so that both young and old may grow in grace, and follow Him who is the way, the truth, and the life.

If you cause us to pass through difficult times, grant that we may cling to Your mercy, and seek your gracious purposes in them. Look in mercy on the sick, the suffering, the poor, the bereaved, the handicapped, and the unemployed, and hear their cry. Bless them with Your powerful love, that they may turn to You, to praise Your holy name.

Hear and grant these and all other prayers, O Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and rules, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### **The 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

<sup>1</sup> This is what the LORD has said: "Maintain justice, and do what is right! For My salvation is coming close, and My righteousness will soon be revealed..."

<sup>6</sup> "As for the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD to minister to Him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be His

servants, and as for everyone who keeps the Sabbath without profaning it, and as for those who hold firmly to My Covenant, <sup>7</sup> these I shall bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My House of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar. For My House will be called 'a house of prayer' for all the peoples."

<sup>8</sup> The Lord GOD, who gathers the dispersed people of Israel, declares, ‘I shall gather still others to them besides those who have already been gathered to them.’”

Romans 11:1-2a, 13-15, 28-32

<sup>1</sup> Therefore I ask, “God has not rejected His people, has He?” Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. <sup>2</sup> God has not rejected His people, whom He foreknew...

<sup>13</sup> I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I continue to glorify my ministry, <sup>14</sup> in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. <sup>15</sup> For, if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ...

<sup>28</sup> From the viewpoint of the Good News, they are enemies on your account, but, from the viewpoint of election, they are dearly loved because of their fathers. <sup>29</sup> For the gifts and the calling of God cannot be revoked. <sup>30</sup> For, as you were once disobedient to God, yet you have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, <sup>31</sup> so also these people have become disobedient now, while you enjoy mercy, that they also may now receive mercy.

<sup>32</sup> For God has locked all people into disobedience in order that He may be merciful to all people.

Matthew 15:21-28

<sup>21</sup> Then Jesus went out from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> A Canaanite woman of that territory came out and began to shout: “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.”

<sup>23</sup> However, He did not answer her a word. Then His disciples came to Him and urged Him, “Send her away! For she keeps shouting after us.”

<sup>24</sup> He answered, “I have been sent only to the lost sheep of the family of Israel.”

<sup>25</sup> Then she came, bowed down before Him, and said, “Lord, help me!”

<sup>26</sup> He answered, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the pet dogs.”

<sup>27</sup> She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the pet dogs eat some of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters.”

<sup>28</sup> Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, your faith is great! Let it be done for you as you wish!”

From that hour her daughter was made well.