

Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – 2023

Amos 5:18-24

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13

Is foolishness contagious? In the movie *Billy Madison*, Adam Sandler plays a dimwitted heir to a fortune. In order to prove himself worthy to receive this inheritance, Billy has to demonstrate a command of basic school knowledge and elementary business principles. He's engaged in a Jeopardy type battle against his nemesis at the climactic scene and offers a less than stellar answer to one question. The judge replies to Billy's answer: "Mr. Madison, what you've just said is one of the most insanely idiotic things I have ever heard. At no point in your rambling, incoherent response were you even close to anything that could be considered a rational thought. Everyone in this room is now dumber for having listened to it. I award you no points, and may God have mercy on your soul." Is foolishness contagious?

Did Benedict Arnold have an unhappy effect on the patriotism of those in his influence? What about Judas Iscariot? Did Judas' unfaith rub off on others who were close to him? "Bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:33). St. Paul wrote that. He wrote that to the Corinthians church, which was not a completely squared away body of believers. One guy was sleeping with his father's wife (1 Corinthians 5:1). St. Paul was concerned about that sort of ugliness being contagious. "Let him who has done this be removed from among you" (1 Corinthians 5:2). Elsewhere St. Paul compares foolishness to gangrene and says that their talk will spread to others (2 Timothy 2:17). What is one to do with gangrene? Cut it out, otherwise the whole body is cooked. Is foolishness contagious? Billy Madison is an affable fool. We love affable fools. Is there anything more sinister out there on the tele? Is the world supremely interested in making you foolish? Are you the one person on the planet who is invulnerable to the deceitfulness, the idolatry, the vanity of the world? Solomon, known for his wisdom, wrote this: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23 – NIV).

One thing that I have learned over the years... you can't force anyone to be wise. No one forced you to come to Christ the King and yet here you are. Being in this Divine Service is the wisest thing that you could do. Jesus tells a parable about the end of time, a parable about the Last Day, a parable about His return. He uses a metaphor as a cipher, a metaphor that is designed to provide insight into what that day will be like. There are ten virgins; their sole purpose is to be ready for the Bridegroom when He arrives; five are wise and five are foolish. The parable hinges on the oil in their lamps. The Bridegroom is delayed in His approach and the wise virgins have ample oil but the foolish are in short supply. When the Bridegroom does arrive the foolish lasses are caught off-guard and are ultimately excluded from the banquet hall. Plain and simple, that means hell. Shut out; banished; not temporarily; forever; this parable is a warning.

Who are the foolish virgins? Well, they're not openly hostile to the Bridegroom. They know that the Bridegroom is a significant dignitary, a man of consequence. They "kinda" want to be ready for the Bridegroom. Foolishness; it's hard to avoid the idea that the foolish are preoccupied with something other than the Bridegroom's arrival. Preoccupied minds, cluttered hearts, a laissez-faire approach to Christ's return – this is not wisdom. The foolish thought that they could "get ready" at the last minute. Oops, sorry, no, that's not going to work. When Christ

returns, people will be hustling around looking for some resource that they know they need, a resource that they know they don't have and can't conjure up. It's sad, really.

Wisdom calls to people *now*. The church lifts up her voice now to any and to all, "come into my holy house and learn prudence, learn sense, for I speak of noble things, my mouth will utter truth and you will grow wise and be prepared for the Bridegroom in my embrace" (Proverbs 8). And wisdom goes begging. Twitter commands eyeballs galore. Tiktok is aflame with traffic and the church's voice is ignored. It is a difficult case to make that our culture is wise. And you, me too, you are too friendly with the world. Is there anything in your behavior, your habits that ought to be examined and repented of, any foolish, contagious thing that you allow to soil your heart as you wait for the arrival of the Bridegroom? Anything? Or are you the only believer that doesn't need to amend something in your conduct?

"Wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her" (Proverbs 8:11). Solomon wrote that. Do you believe that? Wisdom walks by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Wisdom esteems Christ instead of self. Wisdom knows that as much as we do it for one the least of Christ's brethren we do it for Him (Matthew 25:40). Wisdom dies to self. Wisdom dies to live instead of living to die another day. Wisdom knows that today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). All of that is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Scriptures "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). Is wisdom contagious?

One of the things that my dad impressed upon me as I was going off to University was that hanging around with smart people would serve me well. I didn't take his advice. My fraternity was not a hotbed for wisdom or any other virtue for that matter. There was a lot that was contagious at Phi Delta Theta but wisdom was not one of those things. I married a wise woman. Grace Lutheran Church in Escondido, where we first made our home, was a short-term foray into wisdom but the seminary was a fountainhead. God has established His church. There's a reason for the church being exactly what it is. The wise virgins told the foolish to go to the dealers and "buy for yourselves" (Matthew 25:9). Well, at midnight, the dealers weren't at their shops. You don't buy a smoke alarm when your house is in flames. Too late! The dealers... not the Vegas variety, not the used car dealer or the high school head but those who dispense the oil... is it so far-fetched that that is a reference to the ministers in Christ's church? Oil, oil, and more oil – you want it. Wisdom is contagious in this place. Every single one of us knows that Christ is wisdom from God (1 Corinthians 1:30). We preach wisdom. We preach Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23). Eternal wisdom was made man, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. From a brutal Roman cross, God's eternal wisdom shines in radiant splendor; for me; for you. Wisdom bore my foolishness and died. Wisdom bore your foolishness, and died. Now He feeds me. Now He feeds you.

There are wise people in this place. The wise know that every Sunday is a dress rehearsal for the Last Day and that the crucified and risen Bridegroom fills us with His grace, His love, and His wisdom. With Joy we greet Him who comes to us in the Name of the Lord. That joy is palpable, it is real, it is present, and it is Spirit-driven. Christ's church is the wise virgins. Christ's church, believers who know that He is with us to forgive, to bless and to share His life, those believers are prepared. We wait; expectantly, we wait. One day, the trumpet will sound, the Lord will

ride the clouds, and the banquet hall doors will be flung open. One day, your joy, the joy you know now as you hear His word, as you eat His body and drink His blood, that joy will erupt and you will be transformed. In the twinkling of an eye, the perishable will put on the imperishable and joy will invade every fiber of your being (1 Corinthians 15:52). Oil is dispensed here without reservation. The wise treasure it, their hearts are filled with it, and joy at sharing Christ's life carries the wise from Sunday to Sunday.

This congregation is growing. Wisdom is contagious. The Name of our Triune God, Confession and Absolution, the Words of Christ read and proclaimed, the Eucharistic Feast – oil, oil, oil, oil – His grace is abundant. The marriage feast of the Lamb is near. That eternal wedding banquet is standing at the door and is but a moment away. We anticipate that heavenly feast every time we eat of the Lord's body and drink His blood. In today's communion meal the Lord whispers: "Surely I am coming soon" (Revelation 22:20). The wise reply: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."