Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – 2026
Amos 5:18-24
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25:1-13

When I look at the five wise virgins in our new stained-glass windows what I see is beauty. Beauty enriches one's life. We all know what is beautiful. The glory of a blazing orange sunset, Michelangelo's Pieta, a precious day-old infant, a young lad helping an old woman navigate her way, the thrill on a little boy's face when his father comes home from work – beauty enriches our lives. We have a physical reaction to great beauty – our pulse increases, capillaries in our brains enlarge to flow more blood, and our eyes dilate. Beauty is in the eye. The beholder apprehends what is authentically beautiful and life is enriched. It's not physical beauty that I apprehend in the five wise virgins. It's something deeper.

When I hear about the five wise virgins who were ushered into the marriage feast, I see Christ's church. Christ's church is beautiful, radiant, holy. God shares His holiness with us. Holiness isn't an accomplishment of man. Christ's blood makes us holy. Those who are in Christ are holy. Those who are in Christ are beautiful. Christ crucified is beauty of the highest order. Christ crucified *is* love, *is* triumph, *is* the apex of beauty. St. Paul writes that "Christ became to us wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30). In that same section, Paul writes: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Here's a rhetorical question that ought to hit home: "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1 Corinthians 1:20). It's oxymoronic for the church to behave foolishly. Do you agree?

And yet… the visible church in our age hasn't exactly distinguished herself as a stronghold of wisdom. The church, in many quarters, has adopted the trappings of the world's entertainment schtick. The church too often forgets her first love. Here is Jesus' scathing indictment of the church in Ephesus: "I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love" (Revelation 2:4). What is the church's first love? The Gospel itself, the glory of grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, Christ alone. Grace is beautiful. Grace is love and salvation and blood and cross and empty tomb, all coming to bear on sinners in need. The church acts foolishly when she abandons grace. How many of you can save yourself? Whose voice will call you from your grave? Who brought you out of darkness into His marvelous light? Hasn't grace gripped your heart and comforted you with a love that is divine, unmerited, and yet lavished upon you without reservation? God's grace is beauty of the highest order, and you *have known* its sweetness.

A beleaguered father, who was interceding for his possessed son, spoke clumsily to Jesus: "'If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.' And Jesus said to him, 'If you can'! 'All things are possible for one who believes.' Immediately, the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe; help my unbelief'" (Mark 9:22-24). *That* is beautiful. *That* is grace alive in the soul of man as he cries out for help and it is beautiful. A deeply troubled Canaanite mother is begging the Lord Christ on behalf of her daughter, also demon possessed. This woman is humility personified. The Lord lovingly extracts from her the most glorious confession. First, she is seemingly rebuffed. Jesus said to her: "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (Matthew 15:26). This nameless lady gives voice to her trust, born of

grace: “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table” (Matthew 15:26). *That* is beauty. That is beauty which is to be seen and treasured. Thomas, prompted by Jesus to reach out his finger and place it into the wounds in the Savior’s hands, to reach out his hand and place it into the riven side of the risen Messiah, Thomas, in an act of soaring faith utters the phrase that will stream from your lips when you see the crucified Christ: “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). *That* is beautiful!

The wise virgins – they are beautiful. They acted as if there was nothing else to live for but the arrival of the Bridegroom. Grace; their lamps are full of grace. Devotion; their lamps are full of devotion. They had rejected the foolishness of the world and fixed their eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2). Our Lord is going to return. Are you ready? The Lord will ride the clouds, His angels with Him, the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised, and you and I will stand before the Almighty (Matthew 24:30-31). Are you ready? Are your lamps full? The foolish *failed* in their role to be ready when the Bridegroom arrived. Are you familiar with foolishness? The foolish didn’t fill their soul with what is beautiful. Did they hearken to the voice of unbelief, so pervasive in our culture? Did they scoff at grace, scoff at the idea that they should avail themselves to the Gospel, avail themselves to the weekly celebration of Jesus’ resurrection? Have you acted foolish just to fit in? I have. Who are your allies in your pursuit of wisdom? Can you identify them? Who are those who would entice you to foolishness? Can you recognize them?

The unbelieving world, your own sinful nature, and the demonic realm prompt you to be foolish. Sadly, too often you comply; hidden vices, disregard for your neighbor, a cavalier approach to guarding your heart. There are genuine enemies of the kingdom of God, they hate what is beautiful, and they scoff at grace. It’s no game. The foolish were shut out of the marriage feast. It’s a serious warning. The culture around us has no use for this warning. What about you? Those unprepared for Christ’s return will be shut out. What would you do to ensure that your lamp remains full? Are you prepared to act? Are you prepared to hold fast to Christ irrespective of what comes? The repentant are wise. Do you turn from your sin, seek Christ’s forgiveness, and attempt to do better? The courageous are wise. Are you prepared to suffer for the name that you bear. Is wisdom in your character?

Two little lambs were baptized into Jesus’ death and resurrection this morning. *That* was beauty. *That* was grace in action. That was love and salvation and blood and sacrifice and triumph coming to bear on two precious children. Wisdom manifested itself in this holy house, as mother and father brought Daniel Floyd and Esther Rae to the regenerating font of life. Grace; God’s grace is poured out in Holy Baptism. That grace is beauty of the highest order. Daniel and Esther’s lamps will be filled continually by Word and Sacrament in Christ’s church. The spirit of wisdom is alive in them (Ephesians 1:17). They are beautiful. They are in Christ. “In Christ” is baptismal language. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). The foolish dispense with God’s grace and become enamored with works righteousness, synergism, religious self-promotion. The foolish abandon their first love, and they teach others to do the same.

Let’s rehearse what is beautiful. Let’s rehearse what makes us wise. God was made man (the Word became flesh). The eternal Son of God took the form of a servant. He laid aside His

divine prerogatives. He set His face toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). On His way to the apocalyptic tree Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead. Forgiveness; Christ's ministry was one of forgiveness. The beauty of God's grace, so alive in this One Man, captured the hearts of sinners. Jesus stood between the wolf and the sheep. Our Good Shepherd died, crucified, enduring the assault of hell. His corpse was laid in a tomb. Jesus, after His recreating work on the holy cross, took His Sabbath rest in a tomb; Adam's tomb; my tomb; your tomb. And He rose. Death was shattered; the Victor rose. His church is the haven of grace, the bastion of truth, and the infirmary for the sick because Christ resides among us. Through Word and Sacrament, the greatest serves the least. Grace makes us wise. Truly apprehending God's grace and cherishing it makes us beautiful. Daniel and Esther are beautiful for they have received the glory of Christ's death and resurrection through water and the Word. We stand here a congregation ready for our Lord's return. Why? Wisdom and Beauty are in this place.