"The Door"

Text: Matthew 25:1-13

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. - Ephesians 3:20-21

Dear Fellow Christians:

You don't have to spend all much time in airports to accumulate a wide variety of experiences. Allow me to share two. Both are related, and both occurred while my wife and I were waiting to get rolled over to the next flight when the flight we wanted had no available seats. The first was a young man who casually walked up to the gate from which his flight was to depart about *five minutes* before the scheduled departure time. I heard him tell the gate attendants that he had been having a drink in one of the airport bars. Either he had had more than one, or he hadn't a clue how airports worked. The gate attendants stared at him like he was an alien visitor from a distant galaxy. They told him, simply, *"Sir, the door has already been closed."* The young man clearly had trouble grasping the problem. *"But my flight isn't scheduled to depart for another five minutes. Just open the door and I'll board."* Evidently he didn't grasp the finality of *"the door has closed."* He was understandably perplexed and embarrassed, but I have to say he took it like a man. The next one didn't. Different gate and flight, but this time it was a young 20-something woman who encountered the same problem. After whining and pleading with the gate attendants to *"Please, please, please just open the door!"* she eventually grasped the finality of the *"The door has closed,"* sat down in a nearby chair and wailed at what I can only assume was the top of her voice. It certainly would have been the top of my voice. Over and over she howled, *"What am I going to do?"* This despite the fact that the gate attendants had assured her they would get her a seat on the next flight in a couple of hours. We obviously didn't know the full story, but she struck us as a young lady who had met with very little disappointment in her life and was absolutely unaccustomed to hearing the word *"No."*

It's about perspective, isn't it. Those on the other side of the cabin door were pleased to be on board and even more pleased to hear that, "The cabin door has now been closed." Jets don't fly well with the door open.

Yet this isn't about airplane doors. It's about the door of heaven. Consider the opposing sentiments of those who are on either side of that door. Those on the inside know they will never be removed. Those on the outside know, with horrible finality, that they have been irrevocably and permanently blocked. That door will one day close. All that remains to be determined is on which side of that closed door each soul will spend eternity. This is the stark reminder provided by our Savior in our text for this morning. That text is the word of God found recorded in the 25th Chapter of Matthew's Gospel:

ESV **Matthew 25:1-13** ***"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5 As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. 6 But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' 10 And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. 11 Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' 12 But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.***

This is God's Word, recorded and preserved down through the ages to provide us with life eternal. That God's Word would have desired effect in our hearts, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us in the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

Our loving Savior-God has a wonderful way of using circumstances to snap us back out of our trivial, superficial, self-centered shell and to redirect our attention and our sense of perspective and relative worth. In plain English, he uses your friend's recent heart attack to remind you how relatively unimportant is the decline in your 401k balance or the final score of a football game. Damage to the family car reminds you of how infinitely more valuable are the occupants *in* that car, rather than the car itself. You get the point. In fact I'm sure each of you can add a thousand different examples of the same sorts of things that have happened to you – events that have served to remind you of just how trivial we human being can be (especially when times are relatively good) and how often we need realignment.

With that understanding we join those ten virgins in our text. Understand the customs and background involved here. In Bible times it was customary for virgins to await the arrival of a bridegroom with lamps, and, when he arrives, to escort him into the bridal banquet hall, their lamps lighting the way. One of the key points here is that those young women had one job, one role to play in such events: they wait for the bridegroom and guide him to the wedding hall. That's it – that's their one and only job. To fail in that one job is therefore to fail all, to fail completely. In our text that means that half of those professing to be all about waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom failed utterly in their one task.

Obviously Jesus is talking about more here than a simple wedding. Jesus himself is the bridegroom and the virgins are those Christians of all generations who await his return on Judgment Day. The number 10 is very likely symbolic of the total number of professing Christians in all generations.

What then of the oil? Various Bible scholars attach slightly different meanings to the oil, as well as to the lamp and to the fire. Since Jesus didn't explicitly spell it out for us, we can know that identifying each is not important. Understanding his message in the parable is.

Take this picture and apply it to our shared spiritual existence. Many profess to be Christians who are anxiously awaiting the return of their Lord. Jesus' parable warns us that a significant number will fail in this, and they will fail because their faith fails – or in some cases was never there to begin with. Faith fails when we cut ourselves off from the power of God's Word – and that is, or ought to be, a profoundly sobering truth. It is certainly intended to get our attention, but it is not intended to cause doubt among those who truly are believers. In other words, while both hypocrites and those neglecting the Word of God are hereby warned, it was never Jesus' intention to create doubt or fear in the minds of his faithful children.

You recall in our text how the foolish virgins were sent to the store to buy more oil. Imagine that scenario. How much do you suppose they would have been willing to spend for that oil that they so desperately needed? Clearly whatever it took. They would gladly give whatever they had. In that context, the value of the oil is priceless. Now ask the question this way: *What would any human being pay on the great and terrible Day of Judgment for that which would rescue them from an eternity in hell and gain an eternity in heaven? What would he give to be on the right side of that closed door?* Anything and everything – without question and without reservation or hesitation. The horror of all unbelievers will only be compounded by the fact that what they so desperately need, and for which they would now gladly give all, was once freely available to them, but will be unavailable for any price after the door is closed. You have it when you need it, or you don't.

When the cost of anything goes up dramatically, doesn't it make you think about how smart it would have been to have purchased a healthy supply in advance and to have stored it for future use? The power of God's Word is like that. While only the Holy Spirit can create saving faith in our hearts, the increase and strengthening of that faith is also the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that increase and strengthening is available to every single human being, free of charge, right now. ***"Ask, and it shall be given to you."*** Read and study your Bibles, and it will be yours – which is probably the greatest part of the horror that will be experienced by every single "foolish virgin" on Judgment Day. On that Day they will know, beyond a shadow of any possible doubt, that each of them could have had, without cost or limit, that one thing they so desperately needed. And yet once the door is closed, it is too late. Forever, eternally, too late.

Note in our text also how the foolish virgins went immediately to the other virgins to get some of their oil. Typical, isn't it, for fools to expect that someone else should make up for my foolishness? No one is saved by someone's else's faith. In other words, it is foolish to imagine that proximity to other believers who *did make use of the power of God's Word*, and thereby had their faith sustained, will somehow save anyone. That means that the fact that your father or mother studied their Bibles and went to church – which strengthened and sustained their faith – will not save you. The fact that you are a member of a church that offers this power will not, in itself, save you. The strength and power you only *pretended* to have will not save you. Nor can anything else strengthen or preserve saving faith. You can't get what you need from nature – no matter "how close you feel to God." It's not available on a deer stand, fishing boat, in your bed, or on the lake. Saving faith is created and sustained only through the means of grace, the power that comes from God's Word alone.

Our text is designed to clear away the nonsense with which we fill our lives nearly every single day and to remind us just how much of what occupies us in this life really has no lasting value. I am consistently amazed at how often I need to be reminded of this

simple fact, and therefore also how quickly I forget and how easily I am distracted. Maybe your experience is the same.

So it is, on this and every other Sunday, that we focus not on the temporal but on the spiritual. We dwell not on what offers temporary happiness in this life alone, but on that which leads to unending joy in heaven. That is why here we focus always on the Word of God – on Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins he has won for each of us. The world continually wears us down and seeks to draw us away. It make us increasingly drowsy while we wait and causes us to lose sight of our one and only purpose and goal in life. Yet we note with great joy and comfort that although all of the virgins in our text were lulled to sleep by the long wait for the bridegroom, the faith of all did not fail. The five that entered the celebration were the five sustained and strengthened by God's Word.

There is no mystery here as to how saving faith is created, strengthened, and sustained. Jesus once told his disciples: ***"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*** (John 8:31-32) Hear those words! You are among those who have been blessed with true, saving faith in Jesus Christ. You believe that you have not and cannot make up for your sins, but that Jesus has paid that debt for you. Recognize and thrill to the fact that if you can honestly say that you trust what Jesus Christ did for you as the full and complete payment for all of your sins, then you are even now fully prepared to meet your Savior when he returns. You have been washed clean of every stain of every sin. Jesus did that for you. He has placed you on the right side of that door that will one day close, and you need not therefore fear that closing.

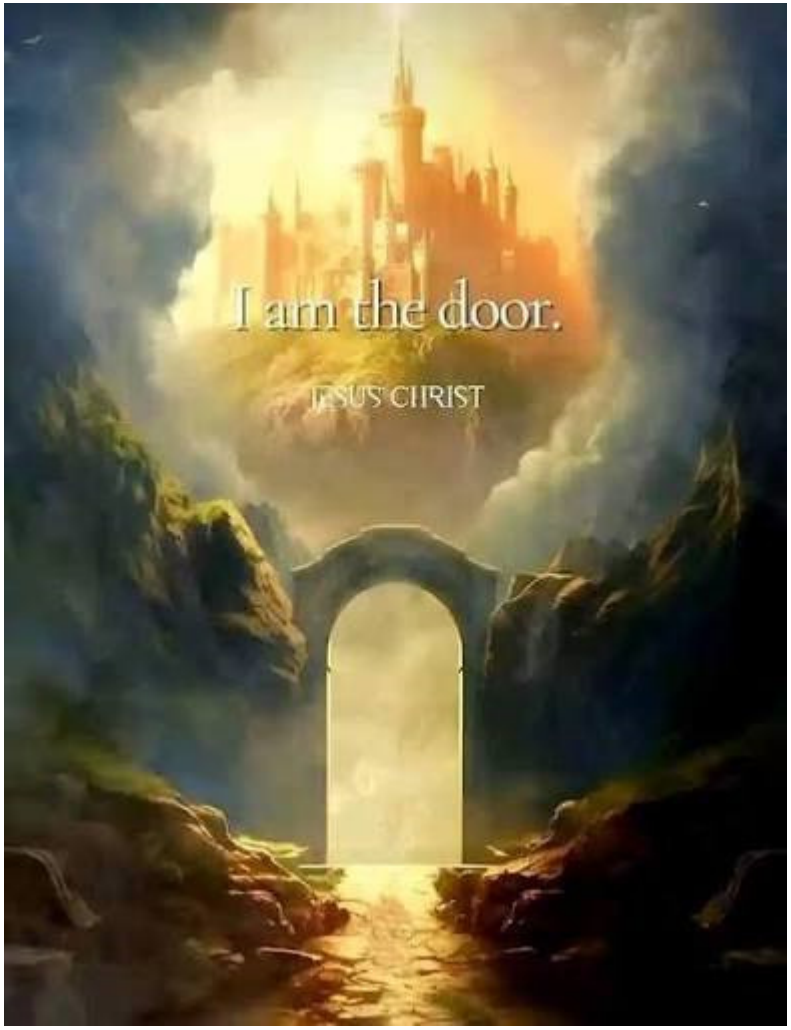
The only question that therefore remains is how you can remain in that good place that has been given to you. Your faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brought you to faith through the power of his Word, and that is the same means by which he will preserve you in that saving faith. Yet that power cannot be yours, cannot strengthen and preserve you, if you cut yourself off from it. On the other hand, what you receive every time you do avail yourself of the power of God's Word is, quite literally, priceless. It provides you, even now, with that which cannot be obtained at any price once the Lord closes the door of your earthly life.

Thank God then for the means of grace – the Word of God – and surround yourself with it, every single day, and you will know only perfect and unending joy and peace when that door of time finally closes. God grant that greatest of all blessings to every one of us. Amen.

ESV **Amos 5:18-24** Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light, 19 as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. 20 Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it? 21 "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. 22 Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. 23 Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. 24 But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

ESV **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

ESV **Matthew 25:1-13** "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5 As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. 6 But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' 10 And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. 11 Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' 12 But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.



St Paul Lutheran Church

Bismarck, North Dakota

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Michael Roehl, Pastor

The 24th Sunday after Pentecost – November 8, 2026

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 589 *(Stanzas 1-2, 4-6)*
"The Day Is Surely Drawing Near"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 31ff. *(Blue Hymnal)*

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

The First Lesson: (Amos 5:18-24) While all Christians look forward with eager expectation to our Lord's return and to the final judgment, our first lesson reminds us that that day holds terror for those who do not truly believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Our society believes such talk to be loveless and intolerant. Their argument is with their God, who will not be mocked. God himself will put an end to all hypocrisy on the last day.

Psalm 84 (Hymnal page 84)

The Second Lesson: (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) Our second lesson gives us the other side of our Old Testament reading, for it speaks of the joy and hope that will be realized by all true Christians when Christ does return. It is a great comfort to know that all who die in the faith will be united with their God and Savior in the eternal bliss that is heaven. God preserve each of us until that great day.

The Confession of Faith -
The Nicene Creed *(Projected on Screens)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 693 *(Stanzas 1-2, 4-5, 7-8)*
"For All the Saints"

The Sermon – Text: Matthew 25:1-13 *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*
"The Door"

The Offertory – (Projected on Screens)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 132
"Today Your Mercy Calls Us"

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Preparation for Holy Communion *(Hymnal page 38)*

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving *(Hymnal page 41)*

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 195
"Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time.
A note on Communion: It is a matter of conscience among us, drawn from God's Word, that communing together is an intimate expression of confessional fellowship based on shared beliefs. We therefore ask those who have not publicly declared their unity of faith with us to first meet with the pastor for the information you would need and want before communing. Please understand that we seek only to follow the Word and will of God and are in no way judging your Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (38) Average (35)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	**-9:00 a.m.**	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service with Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:45 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Monday	**-10:00 a.m.**	– Study Conference in Pierre, SD
Wednesday	**-6:00 p.m.**	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	**-9:00 a.m.**	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Frank Gantt has returned the call to St. Luke's of Lemmon. Pastor Michael Wilke has returned the calls to Gift of God of Mapleton and St. Paul's of Ponsford, MN. Pastor Wayne Eichstadt is considering the call to Holy Cross of Phoenix, AZ. Pastor Paul Krause has accepted the call to Mt. Zion of Detroit, MI.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet this morning during the fellowship hour.

Used Cell Phones – There is an ongoing need for used Verizon capable cell phones in our overseas seminaries. See Pastor Roehl if you have an older cell phone you are no longer using and would like to donate.

Thanksgiving Baskets – The Women's Fellowship is planning Thanksgiving baskets for our shut-ins. The baskets will be assembled on Sunday, November 22nd. Non-perishable items can be delivered any time before then.

Church Christmas Party – Our annual Christmas Party is scheduled for Saturday, December 6th. See the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table.