

20 November 2005  
Last Sunday in the Church Year

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Wake! Awake!”

Text: Matthew 25:1-13; 2 Peter 3:3-4, 8-10a, 13

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

On this Last Sunday in the Church Year, with our focus firmly on the return of Jesus Christ at the end of time, that the readings we heard today speak of *waiting* for His return – well, that’s not good news.

Because we’re not good at waiting. We don’t know what to do. When you’re waiting in the doctor’s office, you read two year old magazines that you’re not even interested in! When you’re waiting in line at the supermarket, you count how many items over the 12 item limit the person in front of you is! We’re not good at waiting, even though we seem to do a lot of it! It’s a waste of time. We want to get on with it, and get it over with.

But we heard from Peter today that with God, there is a *purpose* for waiting. Waiting **for God** is not a waste of time; and in fact, it’s *good* that God doesn’t just come right now and get it over with. His seeming slowness is really demonstrating His *patience* – some Bibles use the word *longsuffering* – “***not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.***” And so, I guess you could say, that we’re waiting for God because God is waiting for us! Waiting for us to repent. Waiting, so that all people would come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved. (1 Tim 2:4)

And so when God tells us to wait and to watch, it’s not to do nothing. It is time graciously given to us to prepare, to repent, and to receive. **To *prepare* for His coming by *repenting* of our sin and *receiving* His forgiveness.** There is still time for foolish virgins to be foolish no more. But time is running out. Each day that goes by is one day closer to the day the Bridegroom will come. Yes, there are and will be some who scoff at this, and not believe it. Seeing the delay as evidence of the untruthfulness of it all. That is how the world acted in the days of Noah as well. But the flood did come, and the door was shut. And the Bridegroom is coming, and the door will be shut.

So what do we do while we’re waiting for Christ? What do we do while we’re waiting for the Bridegroom to come? *We repent.* For it is in repentance that the lamps of our hearts are re-filled with the faith and forgiveness of Christ. It is in repentance that the oil of faith and

forgiveness given us in Holy Baptism is sustained and renewed in Holy Absolution and Holy Communion. It is in repentance that the Word of God has its way with us, giving us the oil that never runs dry.

And that is the *only* oil that never runs dry. If we look for our oil, for faith and forgiveness in our emotions, in how we feel, we will not find it there. Our emotional highs don't last; they collapse and run dry, and our lamps will go out. If we look for our oil, for faith and forgiveness in our good works, we will not find it there. For we get tired, we grow frustrated, and we fail. Our good works don't last; they dry up and our lamps will go out. Or if we look for our oil, for faith and forgiveness in our sincerity, in our piety, in our dedication, in our great knowledge, in . . . what else? Does not everything we have, and everything we do, run dry? And so if we rely on *any* of these things, on anything that we do, then when the Bridegroom comes, we will find we have been fooled, deceived; foolish virgins, panicked, running here and there, looking for oil where it cannot be found.

And so we repent, for it is repentance that makes one wise. Repentance that focuses our eyes on Christ and so relies not on me, but on Him. That relies not on my word, but on His Word. That relies not on what I can do, but on what He has done. That relies not on my sacrifice, but on His sacrifice. That relies not on my life, but on His life. His resurrected life. His eternal life. For that is the open door through which we will enter. The open door of the open grave. The door your Bridegroom opened by taking all your foolish sins upon Himself and being thrown out of the Kingdom, out of life, and into death, *for you*.

Becoming a curse in your place (Gal 3:13) as He hung on the cross. Calling on His Father, our Father; knocking, but receiving no answer. Being considered *foolish* by those who hung Him there, who mocked Him there, who rejected Him there. And they took Him down from there and put Him in a grave, and the door was shut. And the demons danced on His grave.

But then it did not take long for the door to be opened and the Bridegroom to return! Only three days, and those who danced then mourned; and those who mourned now danced! (Ps 30:11) For the Bridegroom, our Saviour, passed through death and into life again. And so the door to life is now open, and through this door your Father wants you to go. You are not appointed for wrath. Hell was created for no man, but for the devil and his angels. (Mt 25:41) All that is needed for your life has been done – your sin paid for, the devil defeated, and the grave opened. You have been appointed for life, and given that life. It is yours now. We are only waiting for the Bridegroom to come again, when all the old that still clings to us will finally pass away, and the new heavens and the new earth will come. We are waiting, and watching. All has been accomplished. All has been done. We do not know the day or the hour, but the Bridegroom is coming. He is coming for you.

And so in their liturgies, the early church would cry out "*Maranatha!*" Which means, "*Come, Lord Jesus!*" That is our cry too. But remember, that He has not yet come, that He

has not yet returned, is not bad news, but good news. And it is not a sign of His unreliability, but of His patience. For it means that the door is still open. There still is time. Time to repent. Time to receive His oil of faith and forgiveness. And maybe most of all for us, there is still time to tell others – the foolish ones who are not ready. Whose oil has run dry. Are we not concerned? Do we not want them there with us? There still is time.

*“Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying!”* we just sang. Indeed it is. The End of the Church Year again reminds us of that. So that we grow not weary and complacent, but watch and wait . . . which we’re still not good at! Waiting . . .

But our Bridegroom knows that; how hard it is to wait. And you know something? It’s hard for Him too! And so He comes to us here, even now. He is coming to us that we may have His joy, even now. And the hymn that we just sang spoke of that, although because of a translation choice, you may not have realized it. For in the second verse we sang:

*“Now come, O blessed one,  
Lord Jesus, God’s own Son.  
Hail! Hosanna!  
We answer all  
In joy your call,  
We follow to the wedding hall.”*

The word translated there as *wedding hall* is actually the German word which, when translated literally, means *the Lord’s Supper*. But it is actually the same thing. The wedding hall, the meal hall, the altar hall – it’s all the same hall! As we gather here, they gather there, and we gather together. One Lord, one faith, one Table. Around the Bridegroom, who has come, is coming, and will come again. They see; we believe. They are receiving the fullness of the feast, we but a foretaste. But the reality is the same. The end of time is already here breaking into our time, and is preparing us for the end. So that when He comes again, *visibly*, in all His glory, at midnight (which means, when time is up), we will be ready. For just as we follow Him here, we will follow Him there. Now we follow in repentance and faith, then we will follow in glory and joy.

So come, O waiting ones. Repent. Receive. The oil of faith and forgiveness is here for you. Look no where else. The Bridegroom soon will call us. *Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!*

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through

faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.