

SERMON  
First Lutheran Church  
Aitkin, Minnesota  
November 9, 2014

Matthew 25:1-13  
Psalm 78:1-7  
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

### **CHILDREN'S MESSAGE – Ten Bridesmaids**

Read text from Spark Story Bible, page 314-315.

Kids, count on your fingers with me. What are ten ways that you can get ready to go to church? (Set your alarm clock. Get up. Clean up. Eat breakfast. Brush teeth. Pray. Remind parents it is time for worship. Help others to get ready. Get your Bible story book. Get your offering. Get into the car...)

Jesus says that being a part of God's family of faith is like going to a wonderful celebration, a big party. Worshiping together here at church is a part of how God makes that party happen in our lives.

Are parties something you **have to do** or something you **want to do**? Who does Jesus invite to come to his party? When you get invited to a party, do you look forward to that? Do you get excited about that? Do you make sure not to miss out on the party?

Are you invited to Jesus' party? Yes! How long will Jesus' party last? Forever. Are you glad to be at today's Jesus family party? Yes! And thanks be to God for inviting us. Amen.

### **ADULT MESSAGE**

It took years for me to realize how much that lake meant to me. I grew up on the shore of **Eire's Lake** near Alborn, Minnesota. We were the only people living on that half mile long, quarter mile wide lake. We were surrounded by miles of county land and woods. Almost every day of the summer, I would be out fishing on it. In the winter I skated on its ice and slid down its hillside. From the sun rising across the waters in the morning to the moon sparkling on it at night, that lake embraced my life from birth until the day that my aging parents sold their home and moved to town. I was in seminary at the time.

We lost the lake. None of us kids could afford to buy our old home place. Mom and Dad were too old to take care of it anymore... It ripped our hearts out.

How then, could I have been so fortunate to end up living across the road from **Washburn Lake** for my first five years of parish ministry in **Outing, Minnesota?** We had deeded access to use the lake, beach and to borrow a boat any time we wanted too. **Here's the tragedy.** In my race to be a good pastor, I failed myself and my family by not using that beach and lake more than perhaps a half dozen times each summer.

We lived in **Littlefork, Minnesota** the next five years. We lived on the Littlefork River and close to the Bigfork River. We were a half hour drive from mighty **Rainy Lake, Lake Kabetogema** and an hour from the **BWCA.** **Here's the tragedy.** Did I work harder to get out on the water there? No.

We took a call to start a church in **Baxter, Minnesota.** We, due to an inheritance, were able to buy a little, old house on **White Sand Lake.** Dream comes true... I use the lake as often as I can... **Here's the tragedy.** I was maybe out on that lake fishing or boating ten times this past summer. Not enough...

You may have heard me say this before. Fifteen minutes spent by any sort of body of water – lake, river, stream, even a swamp – sets me free from my worries and calms my soul. So, why is it that I get so wrapped up in the rat race of life that I fail to take advantage of the water that lies so closely at hand all around us here in Minnesota?

**What is it about the water that is so special, so good for me?** I've thought it through. It may be like you sitting in your deer stand, or in front of your fireplace. **Jesus meets me at the water.** God speaks to me there. The Holy Spirit calms and heals my fevered thoughts... Those waters **reconnect me with the waters of my baptism.** Over sixty years ago, Jesus adopted me into God's family and promised to love and care for me forever. God has been busy keeping that promise ever since. I just need to remember and believe that it is true. **Sitting by water helps me to be reminded of God's faithful presence.**

The Psalmist in our reading for today speaks of this.

**“I will declare the mysteries of ancient times – that which we have heard and known, and what our forebears have told us, we will not hide from their children. We will recount to generations to come the praiseworthy deeds and the power of the Lord, and the wonderful works that God has done.”**

What? **“Remember God’s loving, saving work on your behalf!”**

The Psalmist goes on –

**“The Lord gave a decree... commanding our ancestors to teach it to their children; that the generations to come might know and the children yet unborn; that they in their turn might tell it to their children...”**

What? **“Pass God’s promise of love and care on to your kids!”**

The Psalmist wants us to do this –

**“so that they might put their trust in God, and not forget the deeds of God, but keep God’s commandments.”**

What? **“Put your trust in God!”**

In a nutshell, that ancient believer counsels us to

- **Remember** God is the source of our life and our salvation.
- **Trust** God in all things.
- **Pass along** God’s love and life.

God doesn’t need us. We need God. And God is there for us. And that’s what I keep forgetting when I get swept up in the craziness of life. I forget that God has claimed and promises to keep me through the waters of my baptism. God every day uses earthy water to draw us closely to God, to wash our souls and to empower us to live in faith. **Hope, peace, joy** – so wouldn’t you think that I’d want those Godly gifts? Wouldn’t you think that I could **stop, remember** and **count upon God’s promises** when life is overwhelming me?

I think that that is what Jesus must be referring to in his parable that describes the kingdom of heaven like a **wedding celebration**. It’s another party. Heaven, Jesus says, is like a wonderful celebration of the marriage

of two beloved partners. This parable is promising the **coming of Jesus**, the groom, at the end of time. God's **church is the bride** who waits. **We are the bridesmaids**. And don't miss this amazing party!

In the parable, the groom is late in coming. Our world has been waiting for Jesus to come again for 2,000 years. The tradition in the days when Jesus walked this earth was that the groom would come along, pick up the bridesmaids and then go to pick up the bride at her parents' home. Five bridesmaids came prepared for a long wait and five didn't. The groom finally came; the unprepared five were running out of lamp oil. They, at midnight, had to go and find a place to buy more oil. The five who had thought ahead and brought extra oil went with the groom and joined the wedding celebration. The other five came later and the groom refused to let them enter saying, "**Truly I tell you, I do not know you.**" Jesus concludes the parable by counseling, "**Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.**" It sounds to me like Jesus invites us to be **ready to party with him every day.**

I don't think Jesus wants anyone to be excluded on the **day we die** or on the **last day** when he **comes again**, whichever comes first. I don't think that Jesus wants anyone to miss the kingdom party **right now**. How sad to be so distracted by the world that we miss out on the **hope, peace and joy** that God's party gives to God's trusting people **right now**.

What happens at the lake is informed, for me, by what has happened and happens again and again at these baptismal waters. **Hope, peace and joy start here at these baptismal waters** in God's sanctuary. **Hope, peace and joy** then **revisit me at those Godly waters out in God's creation.**

What if I race through life, seldom pausing to be **renewed at my baptismal waters**, and **miss the whole thing** that God has planned for me? What if I am so busy battling the needs, obligations, duties and challenges of my world that I **miss the healing, renewing power of Jesus**? In the parable, Jesus says that some may not be included in the eternal celebration of love and life with God. **Jesus wants no one, now or forever, to miss out on living and trusting in God's eternal love...**

Harriet has brought me back to the water... We are taking care of my daughter Leah's dog, Harriet, for a year. Harriet needs to be walked every morning and night. I am the morning walker. That dog walking

responsibility brings me to the water's edge at White Sand Lake every day. Every day I am reminded of the baptismal waters where Jesus said, "**You are mine. I love you. I'll never give up on you. I'll never let you go. I will be with you all day today and forever.**"

I don't know about you, but living in the promise that I am one of God's precious children, beloved and cared for every day, gives me the power to **share hopeful words**, to **sit with the dying**, **lift burdens from the guilty**, **comfort the grieving**, **assure the frightened**, **feed the hungry**, and **counsel the troubled**... I couldn't do these things by myself. As a matter of fact, God has given this kind of **power to the whole church**, the whole body of Christ. As a matter of fact, that is the **mission that we share** together as God's people here at First Lutheran Church in Aitkin, Minnesota. **Together, God empowers us to serve all God's people.**

The ancient psalmist taught us to:

- **Remember** what God has done for us.
- **Trust** our lives safely into God's loving arms.
- **Pass along** God's word of promise and life.

That's what we are doing here at First Lutheran Church. Twenty eight hundred years after the psalmist spoke; **we remember, trust and pass along God's love and promise.** Two thousand years after Jesus said, "**Don't miss God's amazing celebration of life,**" we **celebrate again and again** until Jesus comes again to take us all **home forever.**

You and I are a part of something very **ancient**, very **good** and very **eternal** here. **Are you ready for the party? Thanks for the part that you play, here at the water's edge.** Thanks be to God for including us. Amen.