

Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost/November 8, 2020  
Amos 5:18-24 & Matt 25:1-13/Complacency Kills  
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church  
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“Why would you have the day of the LORD?”

“Complacency kills” You may have heard this statement at some point in your life. As drastic as the statement sounds, it’s not really restricted to high-intensity, high-danger type of jobs, is it? Complacency doesn’t just kill policemen, firemen, pilots or military. Think about how many people you know who have been injured or lost their lives simply because they got complacent in their behavior. They got “too comfortable.” They let their guard down and began to think bad, harmful things only happen to other people. When complacency rears its ugly head, it’s only a matter of time before the price is paid. Sometimes, tragically, one even pays the ultimate price for such complacency. What’s even more tragic is many times such deadly complacency produces collateral damage. The deadly error of complacency doesn’t just take the complacent one, but it also has a way affecting those who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Complacency kills more than we know.

As we turn our attention to the Old Testament and Gospel lessons for this morning, we hear our Lord speaking quite clearly on the deadliness of complacency. Apparently, the Israelites of old as well as the disciples of Jesus had a habit of falling into complacency when it came to their faith and their worship God. Of course, human nature comes in and encourages us to shake our heads in disbelief and say, “How could they do such a thing?”

As we saw in the Old Testament lesson, complacency came in the form of simply going through the motions. While they technically were doing all the right things. They were checking all the right

boxes and jumping through the hoops, putting forth the image of a good and faithful person. However, in reality they were offering all these things up to God out of gratitude were replaced with feelings of resentment, boredom, and apathy. Surely, they didn't need to do ALL these things EVERY Sabbath. After all, they were Jews. God's chosen children of Abraham and Israel. That surely covered over missing a few services. You see, their worship and praise, their faith in action, had essentially become a hollow core; an empty shell of what God originally intended for His people, and God was not content to simply let it go. Rather, He showed His divine and Fatherly love by warning them of the punishment awaiting such a counterfeit and empty faith on the Day of Judgment.

Fast-forward eight hundred years and we hear Jesus speaking to His disciples, warning them of the same deadliness of complacency and apathy. The "oil" the foolish virgins lacked was personal saving faith. Notice, they started off with oil in their lamps; they started with faith. However, the monotony and false sense of security of everyday life lulled them into deadly, sinful complacency. The false sense of security that came with trusting in the family tree and the faith of the forefathers lulled them into a personal deadly, apathetic complacency.

Now, it's important to point out here all ten fell asleep. All ten were guilty of becoming complacent to one degree or another. However, the five wise virgins are called wise because they continued to keep their lamps full for later, in spite of their grogginess. The five foolish virgins, however, let their lamps burn and go out, never bothering to think about anything other than the immediate "here and now." "Who cares about later?" When the time came, their foolish complacency led them to foolishly believe they could simply get into the feast with somebody else's oil. What a tragic shock to discover this isn't how it works. Their complacency put them in the deadly tragic position of

complete emptiness when they needed that oil of repentant saving faith the most.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, where does our Lord promise to refill our lamps each and every week? Right here in His Word and Sacrament! He Himself freely gives us the very oil of life we need. “I believe I cannot by my own reason or strength...” That’s one point in this parable often overlooked. The five foolish virgins, after they were confronted with the ugly fact somebody else’s oil wasn’t going to cut it for them, tried to go out and purchase oil on their own at the last second, in the middle of the night. They went looking for their own oil after they had squandered the oil they already had. We’re never told they accomplished this task. We’re never told because it is simply not possible.

Think about it. It’s the middle of the night. All the merchants and shops are closed up. The opportunity to receive oil had long since passed. They had ample opportunity, and they squandered it. How many people do you know who honestly believe since mom and dad are Christians, they’re a lock for heaven? How many people do you know who wrongly believe they’re getting into heaven because of the repentant faith of someone else? On that same note, how many Christians turn a blind eye to the sin in their own midst, fooling themselves into believing their personal faith and repentance will somehow be enough to cover over the sinful and impenitent words, thoughts, and deeds of foolish and rebellious loved ones? How many people do you know who are on the very foolish “eleventh-hour” plan of salvation? They’re gonna do what they want in the here and now, and they’ll repent and give their life over to God when their time comes up. Yeah, that’s not a good plan. I don’t recommend it. It didn’t turn out well for the five foolish virgins, did it? You know neither the day nor the hour, do you?

Here's the ugly truth for all of us: Like the ten virgins in this parable, we're all guilty of becoming complacent to one degree or another in our life of faith. We all get groggy and weak and nod off in our faith. The need for faithful, repentant mission is great, and starts here with us. I guarantee if our Lord and Savior came and stood before us right now in ALL His heavenly glory, you'd probably straighten up in your seats a bit. You'd probably sing those hymns and speak those words of confession with a little more voice and emotion behind the words. You wouldn't just muddle through and go through the motions, would you? You'd put your heart and soul into it! You'd probably break open your wallets and purses and dig little deeper. Tragically, we don't, none of us, at least not as much as we should or could. Those words of Christ, "I am with you always.... Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour," often go in one ear and out the other, our words and deeds betraying the truth of our complacent foolishness.

Now, does this mean all hope is lost for us? Are we actually the foolish virgins and the ignorant, hard-headed, apathetic Israelites in our lessons for today? Well, we certainly can be at times, can't we? However, does this mean all hope is lost for us? Can we only look forward to darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth? No! God's grace and mercy are greater than our foolish complacency. By His grace, like the five wise virgins, He does enable us to keep our eyes and ears focused on the coming of our heavenly bridegroom. By God's grace and the working of His Holy Spirit, we do keep our eyes of faith focused on the all-redeeming cross of Jesus Christ, though admittedly, sometimes a groggy, half-asleep, complacent gaze.

Through the gifts of Christ's own Word and Sacraments, our lamps of faith are continually refilled and replenished by Him with His life-giving grace, mercy, and forgiveness. The catch is you have to be here! This is where He promises to freely administer these gifts; to

freely and fully fill our lamps with His oil of life and saving faith. This is where the Bridegroom is, and this where He replenishes, prepares, feeds and nourishes. Right here, right now! Thanks be to God for such undeserved mercy and grace!

Whenever I read these lessons, I can't help but think back to the truth of the old adage we began this sermon with: Complacency truly is deadly. Complacency truly can kill, far worse than we could ever imagine. May our Lord and Savior continue to grant you the strength, endurance, courage, wisdom and faith to stay vigilant, awake, and actively focused on the life-saving cross of Jesus Christ in all that you say, think, and do. For He alone is our sole source of life, light, and salvation, now and forevermore. May He replenish you and fill you with His life-giving, life-saving Gospel light so as you go about your life in this dark and fallen world that only seems to be getting worse every day, you fear nothing and you may always be prepared to joyfully meet your Lord and Master either here in time when you die or when He returns because you will be with Him forever in the new heavens and new earth.