



*And
the door
was SHUT*

Pentecost 23, 2020-November 8, 2020

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Church

Matthew 25:1-13

“Until the Door is Shut”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

Have you ever been to a wedding and when the ceremony was over, you looked at the invitation only to learn there is a long time before the reception is scheduled to begin? What do you do in this time of delay? We have sometimes met up with other couples that we don't see often and gone somewhere to get some appetizers to catch up with what has been happening in each other's family's lives to pass this time before the reception begins. When we have done this, it can be easy to get distracted in our conversation and lose track of time. What once seemed like an abundance of time to pass turns into a mad dash to the reception in fear that we might miss the announcement of the arrival of the wedding couple before the banquet begins. At these wedding events however, there isn't the same kind of fear of being turned away by the bridegroom as you heard in the reading for today. In the receptions that we have attended, we aren't afraid of the door being shut and not being able to still enter the banquet even if we are a little late. If we arrive late, we still can get in and are even pretty sure someone that we know will welcome us to join them at their table or will give us cuts into the food line without anyone noticing our tardiness. In the reading from Matthew for today, we hear some of the harshest words recorded in scripture when Jesus declares that there will come a time when some will be too late and the door will be shut. I can't imagine hearing any words worse than for Jesus to say, "Truly I tell you; I do not know you."

All of the scriptures for today point to the time of Jesus' second coming when time ends, and the door will be shut. The prophet Amos paints a similar gloomy picture of what it will look like especially for the people that are on the wrong side of the door. The day will not be like those we have had this week with pleasant temperatures and plenty of sunshine. Instead, there will be darkness and none of your offerings or songs of praise will be welcomed. And those who thought there was plenty of time and decided to go somewhere for appetizers and noticed how late it had gotten are in for a scary surprise when they arrive at the door of the banquet hall and find the door shut. Amos describes these unprepared late comers racing to the reception as if they are being chased by a lion only to look ahead and see a bear coming toward them and after somehow escaping the lion and the bear they reach the door of the reception only to find it closed. Then as they lean against this door in disbelief that you have been excluded from entering the banquet are bitten by a snake. Amos paints a very discouraging portrait of what it is like for those on the wrong side of the shut door that leads to the kingdom of heaven.

The psalmist has a little brighter view of this time of delay of the bridegroom. The image the psalmist gives is more like when you have arrived at the banquet early and eaten all the hors d'oeuvres and drank as much sweet punch as you can so that you will have room for the main meal. You are tired of waiting and ready for the arrival of the bridegroom and for the banquet to begin. Your prayer becomes "Come Lord Jesus" and you mean it. I have been with some of you by bedsides of family members who have prayed these words of psalmist "O Lord, do not delay."

If Jesus was interviewing for a job and after discussing all of his strengths and was asked if he had any areas of growth (I guess it's not correct anymore to call them weaknesses), Jesus might have to admit that punctuality is one of his traits needing improvement. When Martha sent word to Jesus that her brother Lazarus is sick, once again he delayed four days until he was no longer sick, but dead. Others may wonder the same about Jesus' tardiness thinking to themselves or crying out loud, why didn't Jesus arrive before I was diagnosed with cancer? Why did Jesus delay so long before receiving this new job opportunity? Why did Jesus delay in healing my illness? Why does Jesus continue to delay instead of speed up the production of a vaccine for the coronavirus? Yes, there are times you may have questioned what seems to you like Jesus taking too long to act.

The Apostle Paul had to preach about Jesus' delay to the congregation at Thessalonica because during the delay, they began to doubt that Jesus would return again. They had been informed by Paul that Jesus was coming again. They had first believed Paul, but in the time of delay many of the people who believed Paul were dying and those who were still alive wondered if by dying, they were too late and if the door would be shut to them. So, Paul preached this beautiful image of what the second coming of Jesus will look like with graves being opened and those who are alive will meet the Lord in the air. Paul reassured these people that were still alive that the door had not been shut on those who had died.

On our trip to Norway in 2016, I was fascinated by the architecture of many of the pulpits in the old churches. They often had a door with a lock on it leading up to the pulpit. Honestly, I had been troubled by the design of these pulpits. At first, it didn't seem right to me having a door to the pulpit. However, I was looking at them from the wrong side of the shut door. I was looking at the image of the door like Amos did. After being chased by a lion and being confronted by a bear and finally arriving at the door, I only saw the lock on the door. I was bitten by the snake. I heard Satan saying, "Sorry, too late."

I view the image of these pulpits in a new way because of these encouraging words from Paul. The door may be shut, but it is not locked. It is easily opened. And what is on the other side of the door? God's word of promise delivered from a preacher and into your ears and making a home in your heart. You and I are in fact living in a time that can also be described as the "time of preaching". We are living in the time of the delay of Jesus coming again, but he has not abandoned us. Jesus is the word made flesh and it is this very word that will not cause us to fear his second coming but will be a time of preaching this word of encouragement.

A seminary professor was challenged by his students after he had taught them that faith only comes from hearing God's word and we are saved by faith alone. The students rebuked that such a God who would have such a narrow view of how to enter the kingdom of God. Isn't having lamps enough? Will God shut the door if

your lamps don't have oil? The students pushed back at the words of the professor and said, "So what should be done with those who haven't heard?" to which he responded, "Go preach to them."

Jesus said, "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this." Ten bridesmaids took their lamps to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. They all were bridesmaids. They all had lamps. They all fell asleep. The only difference between the wise and the foolish was the oil. Oil that cannot be self-produced. Oil that cannot be shared by someone else. But oil that is necessary. What is the oil that is necessary for you to have while Jesus is delaying his second coming? What is the oil that encourages you knowing that you will not be on the wrong side of the door when Jesus comes again? What is the oil that cannot be taken from you by someone else?

It is faith. Faith that is only given to you by the Holy Spirit. Faith that gives you hope when things seem hopeless. Faith that comes by hearing God speak to you. Faith that silences Satan when he says, "you don't need oil, your lamp is enough." The door will be shut one day, just as Jesus said. But until the door is shut, before Jesus, the bridegroom appears, the door is still open for all believers to preach this good news of salvation to all the world. Amen.