

12 November 2023
The Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Jesus “Top of Mind””

Text: Matthew 25:1-13; Amos 5:18-24; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

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

Maybe you’ve had something like this happen to you: You finish eating your dinner and have some leftovers. So you pack them up and put them in your fridge, *intending* to eat them in a few days, or the next week. But you forget. They get pushed to the back, behind some other, newer, stuff, and by the time you remember them, **it’s too late**. What *could* once nourish your body and taste good doing it, is now a mushy, moldy, nose-assaulting mess.

Or how about this: You get a text or an email and you want or need to respond, but you’re right in the middle of something else. So, you think, I’ll reply later. But soon, out of sight becomes out of mind, and when you do see it again . . . argh! The time to reply has passed you by. **It’s too late**.

Or, one more: Sometimes it’s not our memory that is the problem, but time. You want to do something, you need to do something, but you just don’t have the time right now. Work, school, family responsibilities, outside pressures - so many people and things wanting, demanding, your time. And that thing you wanted or needed to do, goes undone.

If I haven’t described you with any of those examples, **first of all**, I’m surprised! And **second of all**, I’m sure you could provide your own story, of a time something went undone, and by the time you got to it, **it was too late**.

This is what the parable Jesus tells us today would have us consider. And think about. And look at our own lives. Because with Jesus’ return and the coming kingdom of heaven, there *is* going to be a time when it is too late. And you don’t want to be on the wrong side of the door when time is up and the door is closed.

Sadly, some *will* be. Who were foolish. Those whose concern for their spiritual life got pushed to the back of the fridge, because there were just so many other things, newer things in life that got put in front. Those who *wanted* to repent, *wanted* to pray, *wanted* to respond to God’s gracious gifts and promises, but later never came; they never quite got around to it. And those who just didn’t have the time. Too much work, too much school, too much family, too many other responsibilities. And then, suddenly, **it will be too late**.

What's *really* sad is that these people - foolish virgins Jesus calls them - **knew their Lord**. These aren't wicked tenants. These aren't prodigal sons. These aren't those who turn their nose up at their Lord. These are folks who know the bride, who would be honored guests and members of the bridal party, but they miss it. By the time they get to getting ready, **it is too late**.

Do you think there are some today for whom this will be true? Some for whom it will be too late? Maybe not five out of ten - maybe not that many; but maybe more. If it were not going to be like that, there would be no need for this parable. But here it is. A warning for you and me. And not just for the end of time, when Jesus returns, but when it is end of time **for you**. When that drunk driver crosses the center line and is hurtling directly at you. Or when that crazed shooter is not in some *other* city, school, or crowd, but where you are. Or when a stroke overwhelms your brain, or a heart attack stops your heart. Or a Russia or an Iran decides to use that nuke. **And it will be too late**.

Not pleasant thoughts, I know! Maybe thoughts we'd rather shove to the back of our minds, or think about later. **But that is not the way of the wise virgins**. For wise virgins, Jesus is "top of mind," as they say these days. Which *doesn't* mean you have to be in church all the time and don't get to do anything else! That's not good and not what Jesus wants either. You have people to take care of and your vocations to fulfill as your loving service to others. And you should do those things. It's when *those* things shove Jesus to the back of the fridge, or to the fringe of your time, or even off the radar . . . *that's* foolish. But oh so easy . . .

So what does it mean to have Jesus "top of mind?" Well, for one, that when you see things happen in our world - wars or tragedies or disasters - Jesus "top of mind" makes those opportunities to pray for others, repent of ourselves, and thank the Lord for His mercy and love for you. That rather than stunned silence or shocked dismay, we use those times to confess the Lord who is able to deliver us from evil. Or, Jesus "top of mind" means each week, each day, includes first and foremost, *Him*. Time with Jesus, receiving His gifts, is not optional or shoved to the back or if I have time or can stay awake, but the first thing that goes on the calendar. So that if today is the day, I am ready.

It's hard though, isn't it? Our sinful nature *likes* being foolish. And I've said it before and I'll say it again today, I think one of Satan's most effective tools these days is not getting us to turn *away* from Jesus, but simply being too busy for Him. That little by little - not all at once - but little by little, He get less and less time in your life, He get pushed farther and farther back, until He is hard to find at all.

If I haven't described you with any of this . . . well, no, I know I have. *There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:22b-23). Pastors, people, all of us.

So for all of us, here's the good news: **you are always "top of mind" for Jesus.** Everything He's doing is *for you*, that you be at the wedding feast. And if He is delayed or long in coming, it is to give us time to clean out our spiritual fridges, to cut the mold off our faith, and be ready. He wants everyone at the feast. No one left out. No one on the wrong side of the door when it is shut, only satan and his army of demons. That the Day of the Lord not be a day like Amos described, a day of darkness, fear, and trembling, but a day of joy.

So to that end, Jesus came and joined us on the wrong side of the door. When all people had sinned and the door to *Eden* was shut - forever! - it was a day of darkness, not light. A day of great sadness. The day the serpent bit, and when the bridegroom came, instead of joy and feasting, Adam and Eve fled and hid. And when the day was over, they found themselves on the wrong side of the door.

But God promised that one day the door would be opened again. God's people lived by faith in that promise, and then when Jesus came, He joined His Bride on the wrong side of the door. He came into the darkness of sin. He came into a world of fear and sadness. And He died in the darkness and with the poison of our sin. All of it. On the cross. Not fleeing from His Father, but forsaken by Him. But this led not to the door be forever closed, but open again. That by His blood on the door, the blood of the Lamb, the blood of the Bridegroom, the blood of the only-begotten Son of God, that door that was once shut be opened again. His blood the key.

The key that not only *opens that* door, but *unlocks* the door of your mind. Your mind shut tight by sin and fear, your mind captive to the things of this world and life, that too often shoves Jesus to the back, so that He is not "top of mind." His blood of forgiveness changes that too. His blood in **Baptism** giving you a new heart and a new mind and a new spirit. His blood **proclaimed** here to restore Him to "top of mind" for you. His blood that in the **Absolution** takes away the stuff that has buried Him in the tomb of our sinful hearts. And His blood that that we **drink** in remembrance of Him - a remembering that is not only mental, but *drives* our lives and how we live them. *Without* these, our fridges are too full, our "to do" lists too long, and our time too short - we'll be off somewhere else when the bridegroom comes and the door is open. But *with* these, Jesus is coming already to you now, so when that day comes, you will be ready, and enter the joy of the heavenly feast which will have no end.

The Thessalonian Christians were worried about that day. Some were worried that they missed that day, that Jesus had already come. Others were worried that for those who died before Jesus' return, the door was shut. Paul reassures them. Jesus had not yet come, and the grave was no barrier to Him! He had risen from the dead, and could and *would* raise those who had died. The Bridegroom will come and call the living and the dead to the feast! **Therefore**, he says, **encourage one another with these words**. Encourage one

another. Help one another keep Jesus “top of mind.” And don’t be too proud to accept their help and encouragement. You need it, too.

And with Jesus “top of mind,” that not only enables you to be *ready* when He comes again and the door is open, it helps you deal and cope with things in your life now. That the things of this world and life not overwhelm and overcrowd and push Jesus to the back, but everything stay in the proper place. That though you have sadness, you not despair. That though there be troubles, you not fear. And that neither the sins of your past nor the uncertainty of the future drag you down, but that you look to the future with joy, waiting for the bridegroom with confidence. Knowing His love, and knowing that He is coming *for you*.

Yes, there’s a lot of foolishness in our world today - foolish thinking, foolish living, foolish beliefs, foolish people. And it does not lead to a good place. So ***watch***, Jesus says. Watch Him. Keep your eyes of faith focused on Him. Then you will be wise in a foolish world. You will have forgiveness in a world of sin. You will have life in a world of death. And you will be ready. And enter with your Bridegroom back into Paradise.

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.