Keep Your Lamp Burning
Matthew 25:1–13 | Rev. Cheryl Farr | November 8, 2026
Sermon Theme
Discipleship means living with watchful faith, not fearfully predicting the future, but faithfully tending the light Christ has entrusted to us.
Big Idea
The ten attendants all expect the bridegroom, but only five prepare for a longer wait. Jesus calls His followers to a faith that endures through uncertainty. We cannot predict the hour of His return, but we can trust Him today, receive His grace, and let our lives bear witness to His love.
What the Passage Shows Us
Jesus tells a story about ten young women waiting to join a wedding procession. All have lamps, and all expect the bridegroom. Five carry extra oil, while five do not. When he arrives late, those who prepared join the celebration. Those who did not prepare return to find the door closed.
The story comes during Jesus' teaching about His return. His disciples want to know when things will happen. Jesus directs them away from calculating dates and toward faithful living while they wait.
When the Waiting Gets Long
The delay reveals what was not obvious at first. All ten looked ready when they arrived, but only five had prepared for the possibility of a long night. Faith can also look strong when everything is going well. Its depth becomes clearer when prayers take longer than expected and life becomes difficult.
All ten women fall asleep. The wise are not praised for staying awake. They are ready because they prepared before becoming tired. Spiritual watchfulness allows room for ordinary life, rest, and human weakness.
Watchfulness Is Not Fear
Jesus does not give His disciples a timetable for the future. He tells them to keep watch because they do not know the day or hour. Trying to decode every headline can feed anxiety without making us more faithful.
Watchful faith asks a better question: How can I follow Jesus today? It leads us toward prayer, obedience, patience, and care for our neighbors. The goal is not to be afraid of the night, but to be ready for the Bridegroom.
Tending the Lamp Through Grace
Jesus does not say that oil represents one specific spiritual achievement. The oil shows the need for lasting preparation. Our readiness begins with God's grace, not with our ability to perform enough religious duties.
John Wesley described prayer, Scripture, worship, Holy Communion, fellowship, and works of mercy as means of grace. These practices do not earn salvation. They keep us receptive to the Holy Spirit, who strengthens and shapes us as we continue following Christ.
A Faith That Cannot Be Borrowed

The foolish women ask to share the oil, but there is not enough for everyone. This is not a lesson against generosity. Jesus shows that no one can trust Him on another person's behalf. Others may encourage us, teach us, and pray for us, but we each must respond to Christ's grace.

A Serious Warning and a Gracious Invitation

The closed door reminds us that responding to Jesus matters. Yet the One telling this story is the Savior who welcomed sinners and gave His life for the world. His warning calls us to turn toward Him now, not to assume that He has abandoned everyone who struggles.

A tired disciple is not the same as an unwilling one. When our faith feels weak, we can return to prayer, repentance, trust, and the grace that has been reaching toward us all along.

Let the Light Reach Others

Faithful waiting is active. Later in Matthew 25, Jesus speaks about feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, and visiting those who are sick or imprisoned. Tending the lamp means allowing Christ's grace to shape how we treat people while we wait for Him.

Key Truths

Christ's return is promised, but its timing is not ours to know.

Readiness is sustained faith, not constant anxiety.

Rest and weariness do not mean that faith has failed.

We respond to grace; we do not earn salvation through religious activity.

Others can support our faith, but cannot respond to Christ for us.

Watchful discipleship becomes visible through love and mercy.

Questions for Reflection

What tends to make my faith weaker during a long season of waiting?

Do I think about Christ's return with hope, fear, or a mixture of both?

Which means of grace helps keep my relationship with Christ alive?

Where have I relied on familiarity with church instead of growing in faith?

How can I help another person without trying to live their faith for them?

Whose life could receive a little more of Christ's light through me this week?

Takeaway

We do not prepare for Christ by trying to guess when He is coming. We prepare by knowing Him, trusting His grace, and living faithfully. We can pray, forgive, serve, welcome, and rest when we need to, trusting the Spirit to sustain us through the waiting.

Keep your lamp burning, not because you are afraid of the night, but because you are looking forward to the joy of meeting Him.

Key Verse

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." Matthew 25:13 (NIV)