

“Good and faithful servant.” Jesus had just told us repeatedly to **“be ready.”** The signs of the Lord’s judgment that we must watch for were conflicts, food shortages, diseases, upheavals, and people putting themselves in the place of the Creator. We realized that these things were literally happening around us, all the time. Therefore, Jesus was calling us to **“be ready,”** now and always—everyday, every moment. The Lord’s judgment and salvation was always right around the corner.

We needed to **“be ready”** so that when the Lord’s judgment came he would find us being **“good servants,”** doing his work of giving to others and helping others. Jesus said we must not be **“bad servants”** who were selfishly taking for ourselves and hurting others. The bad servants would be thrown out of the Lord’s care into the outer darkness of Civilization, where there was nothing but sadness, anger, and pain. Then Jesus told three different parables, each one describing the difference between the **“good servants”** and the **“bad servants.”**

The first parable was a story about ten women waiting for a wedding feast. All ten women had lamps—they all wanted to be part of the wedding feast—they all had listened and had faith that the bridegroom was coming. But five of the women were **foolish**, for they only had a little bit of oil and that oil quickly ran out—as they waited, their lamps went out. The other five women were **wise**, for they had lots and lots of oil, and they were ready to keep their lamps burning for as long as needed. Then suddenly, when none of them were expecting, the bridegroom arrived. The five wise women had **oil** and their lamps were **burning** and ready to go. The five foolish women had **no oil** and their lamps were **out**. So the five foolish women quickly ran off to try and get more oil. But while they were gone the bridegroom started the wedding feast and shut the door. The five foolish women came back and knocked on the door, **“Lord, Lord let us in!”** But the bridegroom refused to open the door and said, **“I do not know you.”** Then Jesus said to us, **“Be ready! For you do not know the day or the hour.”**

Then Jesus told us the second parable. This was the story of a master who went on a journey and while he was gone, left his servants in charge of his treasure. Two of his servants used the treasure he gave them and it multiplied into **more** treasure. But one of his servants just buried the master’s treasure and did not use it. When the master returned, he told each of those who had used the treasure and put it into practice, **“You are a good and faithful servant! I will put you in charge of many things. Come and enter the joy of your master!”** But the one who had buried the treasure and refused to use it said, **“Lord, I knew you were a hard man, so I was afraid and buried your treasure. Here it is.”** The master responded to him, **“You are a harmful and lazy servant!”** Then he took the treasure away from him and gave it to the others who had been faithful. Then the master threw the useless servant into the outer darkness of Civilization, where there is nothing but sadness, anger, and pain.

Then Jesus told us the third and final parable. He said that when the Son of Man comes to sit on his throne and judge he will separate the sheep from the goats. The sheep will be gathered on his right and he will say to them, **“Come, inherit the Kingdom my Father has prepared for you.”** The king will then tell them that they are inheriting the Kingdom because they gave him food when he was hungry, water when he was thirsty, clothes when he was naked, a home when he was homeless, and love when he was sick and in prison. The sheep will reply, **“When did we see you and do these things?”** And the king will say to them, **“Whatever you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me.”** Then the goats will be put on the king’s left and he will say to them, **“Go into the fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels!”** For the goats gave the king no food, no water, no clothing, no home, and no love. The goats will reply, **“But when did we see you and not help you?!”** The king will reply, **“Whatever you did not do for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did not do for me.”**

All three parables and stories fit together and were all about who was the **“good and faithful servant.”** The last story of the sheep and the goats was the key. It revealed what the needed component of readiness was—**practices of love** and service for others. This is what the sheep **had** and what the goats had **lacked**. In the first parable, the foolish women had lacked oil—they had lacked the practices of love. They had listened and had faith, but that faith died out with no oil, with no practices of love. The wise women on the other hand, had kept their lamps, their faith, burning with the oil—the practices of love. Then in the second parable, the servant who had buried the treasure, had buried his faith and the Creator’s Word and not used it—he had not put it into practice. The **“good and faithful servants”** were the ones who had used the treasure of the Creator’s Word, the treasure of their faith and put it into practice. In every story, the **“bad servant”** listened, but then did not practice what he had heard—he continued to take what he could for himself and hurt others. The **“good and faithful servant”** listened and then practiced the teachings of Christ—he gave what he had and helped others.

Are you a **“harmful and lazy servant”** or are you a **“good and faithful servant”**? If you want to **“be ready”** for the Creator’s judgment and salvation, then you must be a **“good and faithful servant”** all the time, everyday—for you do not know the day or the hour the Lord’s judgment will strike like lightning in your life. These three parables are for **us**. All of us gathered here have been given **lamps** by the Lord. We have heard his Word, he has given us faith, and brought us into his church. The question is, will we be prepared and have enough **oil** like the wise women? Will we keep practicing our faith through works of love and keep the lamp of our faith burning? All of us gathered here have been given the Lord’s **treasure**. He has given us his Word, the greatest treasure in heaven and on earth. The question is, will we **bury** that Word and do nothing with it or will we use and **practice** his Word, making it multiply in our lives? All of us gathered here have been placed in this Church community of Jesus’s brothers and sisters. The question is, when the Lord’s judgment comes, will we have shared food, water, clothing, shelter, and love with even the least of these brothers and sisters or will we have lived selfishly for ourselves?

Jesus is the **“good and faithful servant”** who has given you food, water, clothing, shelter, and love when you have needed it. He has lowered himself to lift you up. He has laid down his life for you. Jesus has done everything to bring you into his Church community. Do you want to be a **“good and faithful servant”**? Then be like Jesus—follow his example of love for you. Keep your lamp burning and put the treasure of the Lord’s Word to use by **practicing love** for these brothers and sisters of Christ around you—give them food, water, clothing, shelter, and love and you will be ready. The Lord will say to you at the judgment, **“good and faithful servant”** and you will have everything you need, you will inherit the Kingdom, and enter the joy of your master. But if you neglect practicing love and instead take for yourself and hurt others, then the Lord will say to you **“harmful and lazy servant,”** **“I do not know you,”** and you will be sent away into the eternal sadness, anger, and pain of the outer darkness. You do not know **“the day or the hour”**—so **“be ready.”** The judgment is coming. Don’t be caught off guard being a **“harmful and lazy servant,”** make sure the king can look at you this day and say, **“good and faithful servant.”** Amen.