New Life Episcopal Church

Uniontown, Ohio



COME TO NEW LIFE!

Preacher – Pete Iole

A Sermon for the 24th Sunday after Pentecost

November 8, 2026

Proper 27, Year A

Preamble: I pray the Holy Spirit will guide me into truth, so that I do not speak on my own authority, as I attempt to understand God's holy word for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ. Amen,

Ten bridesmaids went with lamps to greet the bridegroom upon his arrival. Five were foolish and five were wise. The foolish did not have enough oil when the groom finally arrived at midnight, later than expected. Christ ends this parable with the words "Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day or the hour." This admonition impresses the importance of remaining vigilant although being unsure of the details. You might expect a significant event that will forever alter the status quo but not understand the importance of the small acts during the run-up. The miliary understands this so well that they created something called General Orders for sentries, guards and watch duties. Learning the General Orders by rote is one of the first things soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines do in boot camp. While the actual words vary slightly by service and the Navy has an expanded version they all use the format shared by the Army and Air Force, which is as follows:

1st General Order; I will guard everything within the limits of my post and quit my post only when properly relieved.

2nd General Order; I will obey my special orders and perform all my duties in a miliary manner.

3rd General Order; I will report violations of my special orders, emergencies and anything not covered in my instructions to the commander of the relief.

Young soldiers and sailors standing guard, on picket, or even a fire-watch while in barracks are responsible for the safety and security of others. Like our bridesmaids, they are charged with providing everyone else with early notification of a momentous event. There are two requirements to be successful, remain vigilant and prepare for the unexpected. This sounds simple but the consequences can be harsh.

What does this mean to us in practical terms? For those of us here in this room today probably not that much. We believe. We are vigilant, and we are, hopefully, prepared for the bridegroom. Sounds great, doesn't it? Well, what about the part not said directly? Apparently, the wise maids were well within their rights to refuse the request to share oil. By the time the groom arrived there was not enough for all. Unfortunately, it never should have reached this point. We see that all of them became drowsy and fell asleep, probably with every lamp burning since they all had to trim their wicks. How differently this might have played out if they had communicated and cooperated earlier. They could have participated in a rotating watch, lighting only a few lamps at one time. Or they could have recognized earlier that some had inadequate reserves and provided enough time to recover. The foolish actually succeeded in a last-minute effort to get additional oil but by then it was too late.

While I like to think it is never too late to find God, I for one, am not counting on a death bed revelation. But should I be counted with the wise if I also neglect my duty to inform my neighbor that they are not ready, or offer to share the burden of a long and possibly tiresome watch?

Saint Paul tells us we (meaning believers) may not grieve as others do who have no hope because through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. How about doing our part to reduce the number with no hope, even if they don't realize what they are missing? This will by no means give us any precedence at the sound of God's trumpet because, we are told, those already dead believing in Christ will rise first and those alive will follow the angels and saints to be with the Lord forever. Our reading from St. Paul's letter ends by asking us to encourage one another with these words. I'm sure he extended this to include encouraging those with no hope, or lost hope, to find their peace in Christ. I suppose I should consider this as one of my Special Orders, not enumerated but covered in General Order No. 2 (obeying special orders). Best of all there is enough time to achieve this, until there isn't.

Amen.