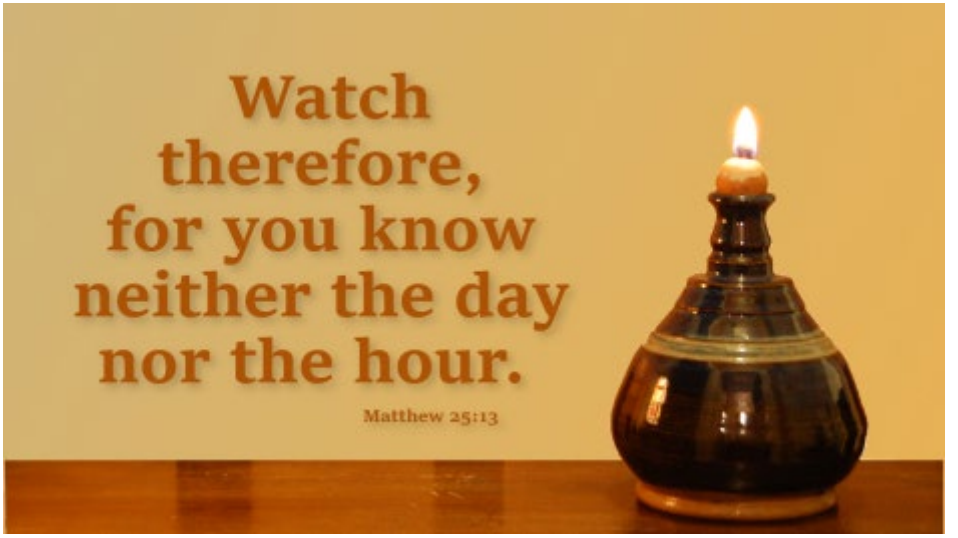
The Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday, November 8, 2026

9:30 a.m. Worship

Thank Offering



"Be and Make Disciples of Jesus Christ"

Grace Lutheran Church
111 Lutheran Drive, P.O. Box 86, Eaton, Ohio 45320
937.456.6258
Email: GraceEaton111@gmail.com
Website: www.gracelutheranofeaton.com
Pastor Dwight Hanson

WELCOME TO WORSHIP!

P - Presiding Minister A - Assisting minister **C - Congregation**
* - Please Stand

Please silence electronic devices.

PRELUDE: ***"Praise Him! Praise Him!" (arr. Mary McDonald)***

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

***CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS:**

P In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
C Amen.

P Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid:
C Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

P If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
C But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Please kneel or sit as you are able.

P Most merciful God,
C we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

P Almighty God, in his mercy, has given his Son to die for us and, for his sake, forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
C Amen.

***SHARING OF GOD'S PEACE:**

P The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C And also with you.

GATHERING HYMN:** ***"Come Ye Thankful People Come" (LBW 409)

***GREETING:**

P The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C And also with you.

***CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 100**

P Be joyful in the LORD, all you lands;

C Serve the LORD with gladness and come before his presence with a song.

P Know this: The LORD himself is God:

C He himself has made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.

P Enter his courts with thanksgiving;

C Go into his courts with praise; give thanks to him and call upon his name.

P For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting;

C And his faithfulness endures from age to age. Amen.

***PRAYER OF THE DAY:**

P Let us pray: God of light and life, through your most Holy Spirit, illumine our lives with your grace so that we may be ready for the coming of your Son. Grant that we may bear the light of your love to the world in need, that all may know of your justice and mercy;

C through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FIRST LESSON: Amos 5:18-24

A A reading from Amos.

18 Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the
Lord? It is darkness, and not light, 19 as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met
him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent
bit him. 20 Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no
brightness in it? 21 "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your
solemn assemblies. 22 Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain
offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,
I will not look upon them. 23 Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the
melody of your harps I will not listen. 24 But let justice roll down like waters, and
righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

A The Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

PSALM: 70

A 1 Be pleased, O God, to deliver me; O Lord, make haste to help me.

C 2 Let those who seek my life be ashamed and altogether dismayed; let those who take pleasure in my misfortune draw back and be disgraced.

A 3 Let those who say to me "Aha!" and gloat over me turn back, because they are ashamed.

C 4 Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; let those who love your salvation say forever, "Great is the Lord!"

A 5 But as for me, I am poor and needy; come to me speedily, O God.

C 6 You are my helper and my deliverer; O Lord, do not tarry.

SECOND LESSON: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

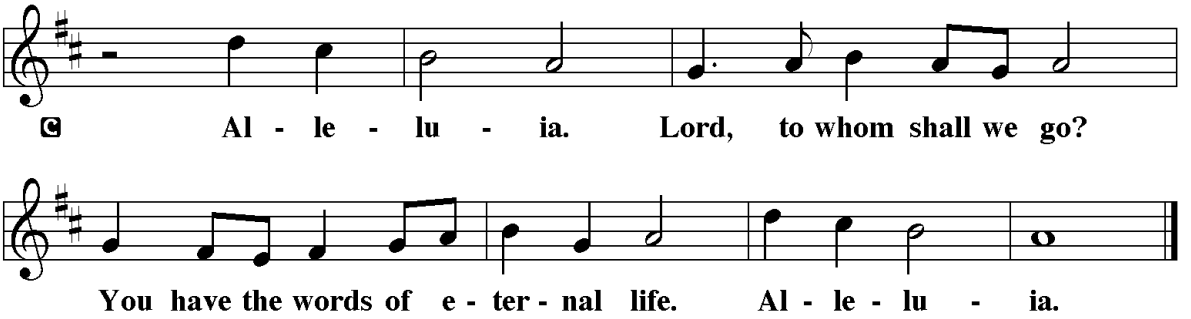
A A reading from First Thessalonians.

13 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep,
that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that

Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18Therefore encourage one another with these words.

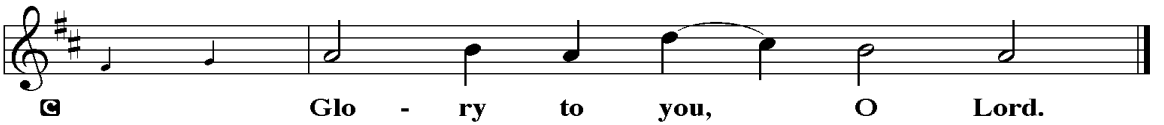
A The Word of the Lord.
C Thanks be to God.

***VERSE:** (LBW2, pg. 83)



***HOLY GOSPEL: Matthew 25:1-13**

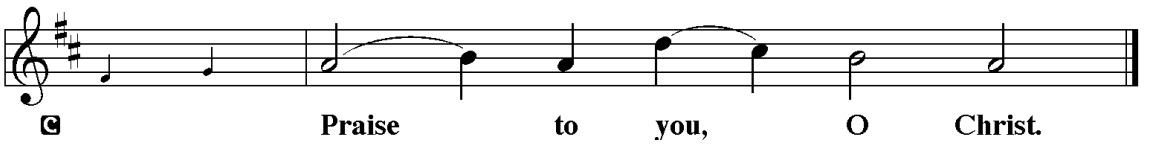
P The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the twenty-fifth chapter.



1{Jesus said to the disciples,} "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. 6But at midnight

there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' 10And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. 11Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' 12But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' 13Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

P The Gospel of the Lord.



CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

SERMON: Pastor Dwight Hanson – <u>I Need Thy Presence</u>

HYMN OF THE DAY: *"Abide with Me" (LBW 272)

***APOSTLES' CREED:**

C I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS FOR GLCW THANK OFFERING:

Please join in the responsive prayers offered by the women of Grace Lutheran church.

CALL TO PRAYER:

A O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
C for his steadfast love endures forever.

A O give thanks to the God of all generations,
C for his steadfast love endures forever.

A O give thanks to the Lord of lords,
C for his steadfast love endures forever.

A Let us pray: Heavenly Father, from the abundance of your grace,
C You provide us with all we need for life.

A You created our bodies and souls,
C our eyes and ears and all our senses.

A You give us food and clothing, home and family
C and all we need from day to day.

A You provide government and wisdom for the civic realm,
C And Veterans who have served on our behalf.

A You protect us from danger
C and guard us from every evil.

A You, Lord, do all this out of your fatherly and divine goodness and mercy,
C even though we do not deserve it.

A Now give us thankful hearts and lives
C as we dedicate these Thank Offerings to you and your mission.

A Please bless the ministries that we support through these gifts.
C May the Light of Christ shine throughout the world.

A Continue to bless the work of the Grace Lutheran Church Women.
C Fill them with the Holy Spirit so that blessings abound.

A Inspire all of us with gratitude and praise in this season of Thanksgiving.
C May our hearts turn to you in grateful acknowledgment of all you provide — our homes and families, our church, our community and nation.

A We pray in the quiet of our hearts for all who need healing in any way (silent prayer). We give thanks to you Lord, for you are good,
C and your steadfast love endures forever. Amen.

As the congregation sings, *"Now Thank We All Our God," (LBW 534)* all who have their GLCW Thank Offerings with them are invited to come up and offer them before the altar. The regular offering, using the plates, will be taken later, in the usual way.

"Now Thank We All Our God" (LBW 534)

1 Now thank we all our God
With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
In whom his world rejoices;
Who, from our mothers' arms,
Has blest us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.

2 Oh, may this bounteous God
Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts
And blessed peace to cheer us,
And keep us in his grace,
And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all harm
In this world and the next.

3 All praise and thanks to God
The Father now be given,
The Son, and him who reigns
With them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God,
Whom earth and heav'n adore;
For this it was, is now,
And shall be evermore.

Text: martin rinkhart, 1586-1649; tr. Catherine winkworth, 1829-1878

REGULAR OFFERING

VOLUNTARY: ***"Come Ye Thankful People, Come" (arr. Rick Parks)***

***OFFERTORY RESPONSE:**
"Take My Life, That I May Be" vss. 1,6 (LBW 406)

1 Take my life, that I may be
consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days;
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

6 Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store;
take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.

Text: Frances R. Havergal, 1836-1879, alt.

***OFFERTORY PRAYER:**

P Let us pray.

P Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things.

C Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made, for the sake of him who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

***LORD'S PRAYER:**

C Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

***BENEDICTION:**

P The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look upon you with favor and + give you peace.

C Amen.

SENDING HYMN: *"Immortal, Invisible God" (LBW 526)

***DISMISSAL:**

A Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

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ANNOUNCEMENTS



The flowers on the altar this morning are given to the Glory of God by:

Daren & Karen Marshall in Celebration of Grand-son,
Bennett's 1st Birthday!

Grace Lutheran Sunday School Fall Schedule

Friends or drop ins welcome!

Regular Classes and Special Events for kids:

November 8: Thankful Breakfast/Pageant Practice
November 29: No Sunday School (Thanksgiving weekend)

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR FELLOWSHIP & EDUCATION

On Sundays

- **After Worship -- Refreshments** for all in the Fellowship Hall.
- **Youth Sunday School classes** meet after worship in the Music Room (Education wing). Bring a friend! Parents/grandparents are always welcome.
- **Adult Education** – After refreshments in the Fellowship Hall.
- **Sunday S'mores @ 6:00 p.m.** Every other week – Middle School & High School-aged Youth. Friends are welcome. Tina Ebright is the moderator, and she can be reached @ 937-472-5663

During the Week

- **Phoebe Women's Bible Study** 2nd Monday of each month – 6:30 p.m. "Discerning the Voice of God". Contact Kelly Mt. Castle (937-336-1223 or Kelly.mtcastle@gmail.com.
- **Moms Group** the 2nd Tues. of each month – 5:30 p.m. Contact: Veronica Forney 1-910-581-8646.
- **Wednesday Morning Prayer & Bible Study –** 9:00 a.m.
- **Graceful Fiber Guild** The 3rd Thursday of each month – 2:00-4:00 p.m. Bring a craft or just come to learn a new one
- **Family Game Night** – once a month.

These opportunities are open to all. Bring a friend.

THIS WEEK AT GRACE

OFFICE HOURS:
Monday -Friday: 10—1, 2—5

TODAY November 8, 2026—Pentecost 24
9:30 a.m. Worship – Thank Offering Sunday
10:30 a.m. Fellowship Time & Youth Sunday School (Thankful Breakfast / Pageant Practice)
10:45 a.m. Adult Education—Studying the Lessons of the day
12:30 p.m. Michael Good / Gail Simms' Wedding

Monday November 9
Pastor's Day Off
9:45 a.m. "Choose to Lose"
6:30 p.m. Phoebe Women's Bible Study

Tuesday November 10
5:30 p.m. Mom's Bible Study

Wednesday November 11 - Veteran's Day
9:00 a.m. Bible Study
3:15 p.m. Confirmation Class
6:30 p.m. Choir

Thursday November 12
7:00 p.m. Council & Executive Committee
7:00 p.m. AA Meeting (FH/Shelter)

Friday November 13
10:00 a.m. SWOMD Council Meeting (FH)
12:30 p.m. Bulletin Production

Saturday November 14

UPCOMING EVENTS:
Sun. 11/15— Worship w/HC, Fellowship & Youth Sunday School, Annual Congregational Meeting
Mon. 11/16—Pastor off, Choose to Lose
Tues. 11/17—Homeless Shelter Meal: Marti Good-Ernst
Wed. 11/18 –Bible Study, Confirmation, Choir
Thurs. 11/19 – PERI Meeting, Piano Tuning, Graceful Fiber Guild, VBS Planning Meeting, AA Meeting
Fri. 11/20 –Bulletin production
Sat. 11/21 -

WORSHIP ASSISTANTS

Altar Guild for November: Wanda Winter, Carol Perry
Offering Counter for November: Karen Schaeff

Sunday, November 8, Pentecost 24
9:30 a.m.

Greeter: Marti Good-Ernst
Usher: Jeff Kiracofe
Lector: Tiffany Ingram
Acolyte: Bechor Bischoff

Sunday, November 15 – Pentecost 25
9:30 a.m.

Greeter: Nancy & Scott Parkinson
Usher: Scott Parkinson
Lector: Mary Shetter
Communion: Barb Myers, Jane Coggin
Acolyte: Jessa Barnes

Sunday, November 22, Pentecost 26
9:30 a.m.

Greeter: Terry & Evelyn Good
Usher: Darryl Leyes
Lector: Carol Perry
Acolyte: Sophia Steiner

Sunday, November 29 – Advent 1
9:30 a.m.

Greeter: J. Allen & Kelly Coffman
Usher: J. Allen & Kelly Coffman
Lector: Kelly Coffman
Communion: Wanda Winter Tiffany Ingram, Janice Barnes
Acolyte: Bechor Bischoff

Attendance & Stewardship ($4,187 needed wkly)

11/01/2026	81	$5,239.00

Grace Lutheran Mission Endowment Fund: The purpose of this fund is to extend the ministry of Grace Lutheran Church, apart from the general operation of the congregation. To learn more about our Mission Endowment Fund, please contact the church office and we'll give your question to the appropriate person.

IN OUR PRAYERS

Please help us by giving an update on the back of the "Attendance & Communion Registration" form. Names will appear for 4 weeks unless we are notified otherwise.

URGENT PRAYER LIST:

HEALING: (In Alphabetical Order)

- ***Kelly Coffman***: (Undergoing more heart tests with an adjustment to heart medications)
- ***Josh & Jaime Cummins & family:*** (Friends of Karen Schaeff – They ask for prayers of strength & comfort)
- ***Jim Courtney:*** (A young father battling Stage 4 melanoma)
- ***Terry Good:*** (at Kettering Hospital after a fall)
- ***Amy & Bryan Jackson:*** (for comfort and healing)
- ***Richard Lehman:*** (Rehabbing at Vancrest)
- ***Allan Ludwick:*** (From Darryl & Teresa Leyes)
- ***Elizabeth & Emily McDade:*** (Terry & Evelyn Good's daughter & grand-daughter – prayers as they deal with many issues including grief)
- ***Dave Noll:*** (Friend of Mike Coe-Prayers for recovery from massive stroke)
- ***Gary Pemberton, Sr:*** (He's been diagnosed with Prostate cancer)
- ***Barbara Perry:*** (Carol Perry's step-daughter – as she prepares for a stem cell transplant to help treat multiple myeloma)
- ***Beverly Proeschel:*** (Prayers for healing of a broken ankle)
- ***Tom Schamel:*** (Prayers for healing)
- ***LeRoy Schatzle:*** (Billie Kay's husband in need of prayers for healing)
- ***Iva-Laura Sherry:*** (Diagnosed with melanoma-having procedure)
- ***Dean Shetter:*** (as they deals with heart issues)
- ***Jon Tucker:*** (At home & doing well - recovering from a stay in the hospital)

LONG-TERM PRAYER LIST: Linda Lambert, Becky Haws, Charlie, Tracy, Jim Carlisle, Dave O'Shea, George & Barb Suggs, Mark & Jary Tannehill, Jackie Steiner, Connie Martin, Maggie Risko, Rhonda Paige Atkinson, Amy & Bryan Jackson, Andy Proeschel, Judy Newkirk, Mike & Judy Schamel, Suzan Pauley, Tom Schamel, Amanda & Shayla Dell, Fran Kester, Teddi & Mike Watkins, Jenifer Combs, Doug Davis, Pastor Dean & Sandy Haferman, Dave Brumbaugh, Scot Emig, Barbara Worley, Carolyn MacFadyen, Judy Jay, Will Suggs, Earl House, Barbara Lakes, Becky Hoskins, Kayli Johnson, Joe McHenry, Tom Barnes: and those serving in the military: Maj. Love Hartman; Brad Newkirk; Lt. Col. Kyle Hundley, Travis Deck & family

Great Commission Outreach Partners:

World Mission Prayer League—Chris & Emily and family, Lutheran Military Veterans and Families, Abundant Grace, West Chester



Pick up your boxes in the Narthex!

Boxes will be due back to Church by Sunday, November 15, 2026.

Place filled boxes on the bench in the Narthex.

PACK A SHOEBOX

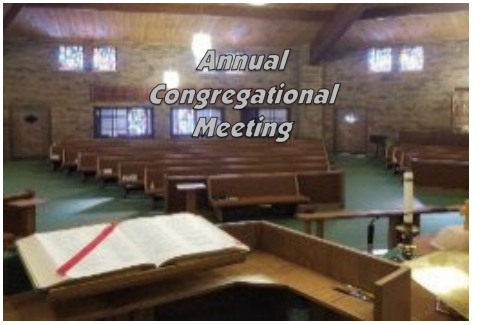
Scan or visit **samaritanspurse.org/occ** to learn more about how God can use a gift-filled shoebox given in Jesus' Name to transform a child, their family, and their community.

VIEW SOLICITATION DISCLOSURE INFORMATION FOR SAMARITAN'S PURSE ONLINE AT SAMARITANSPURSE.ORG/DISCLOSURE.

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The Annual Congregational Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, November 15, 2026 following 9:30 a.m. worship in the Sanctuary.

The Agenda will include:

- Approval of May 2026 Congregational Minutes
- Election of new council members for 2027
- Approval of 2027 Budget
- As Well as Other Items for Consideration/Authorization



LET'S DECK THE WALLS, etc.!!!!!

On Saturday, November 28th

Let's meet to decorate the sanctuary and around the church We'll get together at **10:00!**

Many hands make light work!

ome, and bring your family and friends!



Grace's Homestyle Thanksgiving Dinner

Thursday November 26th

This year we will be hosting a Homestyle Dinner in the Fellowship Hall

We want to extend a **Special Invitation** to those who may not have family to share a meal with or cannot prepare an entire meal. We will cook the Turkey and are asking everyone to bring a Special side dish or dessert that reminds them of Thanksgiving's past.

This year we are asking for help in the kitchen . . . set-up/clean-up, etc.

Cooking will start early in the morning with dinner is planned to be served at 1:00 p.m.

Friends and Family are welcome to join us as this is truly a Family Celebration as we are all Family in Grace!

A Sign-up Sheet is available in the Narthex.
Come early as we will have activities planned and the Thanksgiving Day Parades to watch on TV.

What better way to Celebrate than with your Grace Family!

N O T E S

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 27) – November 8, 2026

[10] And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. [11] Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' [12] But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' [13] Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

- Matthew 25:10-13 –

Because the bridegroom is delayed in coming, they need extra oil for their lamps. The wise virgins brought extra oil, but the foolish virgins did not. Thus, when the bridegroom comes, the foolish virgins must go out in search of oil. As a result, they miss the procession and are shut out of the feast. So, it initially seems that the wise virgins are saved by their good works while the foolish virgins are damned for their carelessness.

However, the symbolism of this parable supports a gospel emphasis. The bridegroom is Jesus the Messiah. The wedding feast is The Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The lighted lamps represent saving faith that shines forth in words and deeds. Finally, the oil represents the work of the Holy Spirit in creating and sustaining this saving faith. Thus, the wise virgins are saved by their faith in Christ while the foolish virgins are damned by their unbelief.

This interpretation is clinched by the words of the Lord to the foolish virgins, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you." This doesn't mean that the Lord did not know who they were. It means that he did not know them in a saving relational way. So, the message of the parable is to believe the gospel and trust in the work of Christ before it is too late. This is gospel proclamation, not works-righteousness.

Another emphasis of the parable is that the coming of Christ will be surprising and uncertain. Go back and read Matthew 24. In Matthew 24 Jesus' disciples think that the destruction of the Temple and the end of the history will be one and the same event. In response Jesus says that the destruction of the Temple will occur within their own generation and will be preceded by signs. By contrast, the second coming will not be preceded by signs and will therefore catch people by surprise. This is a good antidote to both end time speculation and spiritual sloth.

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On Being Ready

Find the 39 ***bold*** *words from Matthew 25:1-10, 13 (ESV)*

E Z D E R S K B T W O N K V I
J M V O H O L I P P C R Y I B
K I O U O R N M N F E W D R O
G Z T C F R U O O G V L F G S
D E Y A L E D O D T D I S I R
I W Y A D F L R H E V O Y N E
F M A R R I A G E E M D M S L
D L W T S B I E J M A M R L A
R N A H C N G D F E B E I E E
O E E S D H N I R E H O N R D
W T B I K E I R Z T S O M E T
S P M A L S O B I B U E S I W
Y H K O O O G E U G F E A S T
E Y I S U R N Y H K V V X R U
T V W M T M D R H E A V E N N

"Then the **kingdom** of **heaven** will be like **ten virgins** who took their **lamps** and went to **meet** the **bridegroom. Five** of them were **foolish**, and five were **wise.** For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no **oil** with them, but the wise took **flasks** of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was **delayed**, they all became **drowsy** and **slept**. But at **midnight** there was a **cry**, 'Here is the bridegroom! **Come** out to meet **him**.' Then all those virgins **rose** and **trimmed** their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, '**Give** us **some** of your oil, for our lamps are **going out**.' But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be **enough** for us and for you, go rather to the **dealers** and buy for yourselves.' And while they were going to **buy**, the bridegroom came, and those who were **ready** went in with him to the **marriage feast**, and the **door** was **shut. Watch** therefore, for you **know neither** the **day** nor the **hour.**

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24th Sunday after Pentecost; 11/8/2026; Grace Lutheran Church; Pastor Dwight Hanson

Amos 5:18-24; Psalm 70; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

Children's message: How many of you remember the song "Give me oil in my lamp"? Did you know that the song was inspired by the Bible? In fact, it's our Gospel reading for today. But I've got a question for you… Why would a lamp need oil if you can just turn on a light switch? (See lamp on bulletin cover.) Did they have electricity back then? How did they see anything at night? Give me oil in my lamp! We are like those lamps. We need everything that God gives us so that His Light can shine in our lives and through us to others. What happens to the darkness as soon as light is kindled? It gets pushed back. This is why we light candles on the altar. Jesus is the light of the world. That's what we're doing here today, asking our Lord to fill us up so that we can shine every day. Let's pray…

I Need Thy Presence

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

The main focus today will be on the Gospel passage. But first, a few comments about those strong words from Amos. God spoke bluntly to the people who bore His name. They had become the equivalent of a hollow tree, still keeping up external appearances, but without the internal faithfulness by which good fruit grows, for the blessing of others. Simply put, the tree had rotted, though the majority of them failed to see it at the moment.

Speaking of the people, they assumed that "the day of the Lord" would bring judgement on the heads of their enemies, which was true. But judgement was also pointing their direction, if they didn't repent. God wants every heart and mind reconciled to Him, oil in every lamp. This is consistent throughout the Bible and history. It's ultimately why Jesus walked the earth and laid down his life, to bring

each and every one of us Home. We will find this very theme in our Gospel passage.

The wise maidens took extra oil, believing that the groom would return, but also being fully aware that the night could be long. That's the crucial combination, faith *and* patience. They trusted the promise, yet did not rely on their own understanding for matters that were beyond them, like the timing of ultimate deeds. As the Christian Church awaits the return of Christ in glory, we gather regularly to fill our lamps according to God's Word, that we may be prepared. After all, what use is a lamp without oil?

But perhaps a question arises at this point. Since we're celebrating a thank-offering today, led by the women of Grace in a spirit of generosity, we may find ourselves wondering why the maidens in the passage either wouldn't or couldn't share with the other maidens who were unprepared? Remember, this whole picture is a comparison to the Kingdom and faith. There comes a point where it matters whether each particular person has tended to their lamp.

Professor George Buttrick put it this way: "This preparedness each maiden made, or failed to make, for herself. There is an individuality of response to Christ which no bestowal of the whole church can ever cancel. The wise ones in their foresight were not deceived by apparent delay or by the routine march of days" (pg. 556, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 7).

Some things can be done for others, and some cannot. Can you exercise on someone else's behalf, such that they get the physical benefits? It doesn't work that way. Or think about what it takes to be resilient. If someone has consistently taken the easy way out of life's difficult dilemmas, what happens when an *inescapable* challenge

arrives? Is resiliency the kind of thing that can be borrowed on a moment's notice?

The oil for the lamps in ancient times was pure olive oil. Does a grove of such trees mature in a day? We're thinking long-term, like all agricultural imagery. Even when the oil is ready, an oil flask doesn't fill itself. It *gets* filled. Isn't that why we're here? God gives the growth (1 Cor. 3:7). God does the filling (Acts 2:4). Such is worship and Sunday School and prayer and service.

Now, is it possible for a person to manage without being filled by the things of God? Perhaps for a little while. But, to turn a phrase on its head, when we presume the blessings, we're *playing with a <u>lack</u> of fire*, running close to empty when the night may be longer than anticipated.

This particular passage isn't focused so much on sharing. For some things can't be shared. It's focused on *preparing*. In matters of faith, God intends to have a relationship with every one of us, with His light warming each heart and illuminating each mind.

In other words, the children's song is right on the mark. "Give me oil in my lamp." Grant me the wisdom to keep coming to the source, God's Word, Christ's gathering, that the vessel may ever be filled, so that the flame of faith may be steady, and the light of Jesus shine, even in the darkest times, especially in the darkest times. This is the prayer of every child of the Heavenly Father. May we never get so caught up or deceived by the diversions of this life that we forget to fill the vessel. May we never lose hope, just because the return seems delayed, according to our timeframe.

And now, with that part cleared up, there's "the rest of the story." Behold the oil lamp, itself, straight from Bible times. Made of

pottery, a lamp was a vessel that usually had a spout to one side, which held a wick, often made of flax, that drew the olive oil up to meet the flame. It operated like the candles on the altar.

Now, imagine if, in our day, a solar flare somehow knocked out all electricity and managed to ruin all batteries at the same time. I don't know if that's scientifically possible, but work with me here. Oh, how dark everything would be after sunset. That's how important lamps were to people in ancient times.

As I read in a Bible Dictionary: "In houses and public buildings lamps were placed in niches, on shelves jutting out from the walls, or on lampstands; in later times, they were hung from the ceiling. In addition to their chief function of illumination, lamps played a central role in religious practices. The tending of the 'eternal light' in the Jerusalem Temple was a sacred duty. In later Jewish tradition, Jews lit special oil lamps on Friday evening and on the eve of every holiday" (pg. 546, Harper's Bible Dictionary). *We stand* in that tradition with the lighting of candles for worship, highlighted primarily by the Christ Candle, which we use on festivals, and perhaps most notably on Christmas Eve, many candles, held by each in the dark, in honor of the arrival of the Light of the world.

Take this idea all the way back to the beginning of organized worship in the tent-tabernacle from Exodus (25:31-40). Inside the Tabernacle was the golden lampstand, the menorah. It had seven branches. The top of each branch was in the shape of? Yes, you guessed it, an almond tree blossom. This blossom-shape actually formed a vessel to hold the oil. It was, of course, symbolic. But what spiritual significance could an almond blossom have?

"The almond tree is one of the earliest to awaken after winter, often blooming while other trees still appear dormant. Its delicate white-pink blossoms emerge before the leaves, lighting hillsides in late January and February…. The swift transition from blossom to fruit makes it a natural emblem of vigilance and rapid fulfillment" (Topical Lexicon; biblehub.com/hebrew/8247.htm).

In other words, the lamps, shaped like almond blossoms, represented both Light and Life (Biblehub.com/Hebrew/strongs/_8246.htm; שָׁקַד, *shaqad*). Remember what St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "*for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)"* (Eph. 5:8-9; ESV). Light begets fruit, life, abundance, sharing, blessing, thankfulness, and on and on, forever.

Note that in the Gospel the gathering of the extra oil was for the purpose of not missing out on the most wonderful of events, the return of Christ himself! It's pictured as a bridegroom's arrival. As one Bible teacher pointed out, "A wedding party was one of the greatest of all festivities in a Palestinian village" (pg. 555, Sherman Johnson, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 7). Regular duties were suspended in honor of the event. That's the image Jesus wanted in our minds for his return.

So, while God's people throughout time are not to be naïve about the battle between the darkness and the Light, aware that the spiritual darkness may linger longer than we like, something, or better yet, *Someone* very good is coming.

Dr. Buttrick: "The theme is preparedness, not for the worst…but for the best." "Joy at midnight!" (pg. 556, 557, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 7). Because of that bright and festive goal, we do not want to be caught off guard by those dark hours before the groom's arrival. It's not all easy. Such

is life in a contested world, where sin isn't just out there. The darkness also battles within the heart and mind of each person, particularly when we think we know better than God.

Jesus is the Light who gives true Light. As we've sung since childhood, "Give me oil in my lamp." Or, as we'll sing in our great old hymn of the day, "I need thy presence ev'ry passing hour" (Abide with Me; LBW #272). And every passing hour, Jesus meets that need. Thanks be to God. Amen.