

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this day. The title for today's sermon is "Complacency Kills" by Jason Zirbel. It is based on the Old Testament text, from Amos chapter 5. Let us pray.... Amen

“Complacency kills.” I’m sure you’ve heard this statement many times in your life. As drastic as the statement sounds, it’s not really restricted to high-intensity, high-danger type of jobs. Complacency doesn’t just kill policemen or firemen or pilots or military folks. Just think about how many people you know who have been injured or who have lost their lives simply because they got complacent in their behavior. They got “too comfortable.” They let their guard down. They actually began to think that those sorts of bad, harmful things you hear about only happen to other people. When that sort of complacency rears its ugly head, it’s only a matter of time before you pay the price. Sometimes, tragically, one even pays the ultimate price for such complacency. And what’s even more tragic is the fact that many times such deadly complacency has a way of producing collateral damage. The deadly error of complacency doesn’t just take down the complacent one, but it also has a way taking down those who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Complacency kills...more than you know.

As we turn our attention to today's Old Testament and Gospel lessons, we hear our Lord speaking quite clearly on the deadliness of complacency. Apparently, the Israelites of old as well as the disciples of Jesus had a bad habit of falling into complacency when it came to their faith and their worship God. Of course, human nature comes in and encourages us to shake our heads in disbelief and say, “How could they do such a thing?” Yet, this is the wrong question. Perhaps a better question should be: 'What exactly is complacency?' 'What does true complacency look like when it comes to matters of faith and worship?' More importantly, are we guilty of this same complacency in our lives of faith?

As we saw in the Old Testament lesson, complacency came in the form of simply going through the motions. Notice: They were technically doing all the right things. They were meeting at the appointed time on the Sabbath. They were sacrificing. They were singing. They were holding thanksgiving feasts. They were checking off the right boxes and jumping through all the right hoops, putting forth the image of a good and faithful person. However, the reality that they were offering all these things up to God, their Father, Creator, and Provider, had long ago been pushed into the background, replaced instead with feelings of resentment, boredom, and apathy. They were going through all the motions, putting forth an image, and nothing more. They didn’t need to do ALL these things EVERY Sabbath. After all, they were Jews. They were God’s chosen children of Abraham and Moses. That surely covered over missing a few services or not being as genuine in their faith and trust. You see, their worship and praise—their faith in action—had essentially become a hollow core; an empty shell of what God had originally intended His people to have, and God was not content to simply let it go. Rather, God showed

His divine and Fatherly love by warning them of the punishment that awaits such a counterfeit and empty faith on the Day of Judgment.

Fast-forward eight hundred years and we still hear Jesus speaking to His disciples, warning them of the same deadliness of complacency and apathy. The “oil” that the foolish virgins lacked was personal saving faith. Notice: They did start off with oil in their lamps. They did start off with faith. However, the monotony and false sense of security of everyday life lulled them into deadly, sinful complacency. The false sense of security that came with trusting in the family tree and the faith of their forefathers had lulled them into a personal deadly, apathetic complacency.

Now, it’s important to point out here that all ten fell asleep. All ten were guilty of becoming complacent to one degree or another. However, the five wise virgins are called wise because they continued to keep their lamps full for later, in spite of their grogginess. The five foolish virgins, however, let their lamps burn and go out, never bothering to think about anything other than the immediate “here and now.” “Who cares about later?” When the time came, their foolish complacency led them to foolishly believe that they could simply get into the feast with somebody else’s oil/repentance/faithfulness. What a tragic shock to discover that this isn’t how it works. Their complacency put them in the deadly tragic position of complete emptiness when they needed that oil of repentant saving faith the most.

My brothers and sisters in Christ: Where does our Lord promise to refill our lamps each and every week? Right here in His Word and Sacrament! He Himself freely gives us the very oil of life and faith we need. “I believe I cannot by my own reason or strength....” That is one point in this parable that’s often overlooked. The five foolish virgins, after they were confronted with the ugly fact that somebody else’s oil wasn’t going to cut it for them, tried to go out and purchase oil on their own at the last second, in the middle of the night. They went looking for their own oil after they had squandered the oil they already had been given. We’re never told that they accomplished this task. We’re never told because it is simply not possible.

Think about it. It’s the middle of the night. All the merchants and shops are closed up. The opportunity to receive oil had long since passed. They had ample opportunity, and they squandered it. How many people do you know who honestly believe that since mom and dad are Christians, they’re guaranteed to get into heaven? How many people do you know who wrongly believe that they’re getting into heaven because of the repentant faith of someone else? How many people do you know who think they will get into heaven just by going through the motions without any faith in God. On that same note, how many Christians turn a blind eye to the sin in their own midst, fooling themselves into believing that their personal faith and repentance will somehow be enough to cover over the sinful and impenitent words, thoughts, and deeds of foolish and rebellious loved ones? How many people do you know who are on the very foolish

“eleventh-hour” plan of salvation? They’re gonna do what they want in the here and now, and they’ll repent and give their life over to God when their time comes up. Yeah...that’s not a good plan. I don’t recommend it. It didn’t turn out well for the five foolish virgins, did it? You know neither the day nor the hour, do you?

And here’s the ugly truth for all of us: Like the ten virgins in this parable, we’re all guilty of becoming complacent to one degree or another in our life of faith. We all get groggy and weak and nod off in our faith. The need for faithful, repentant mission is great, and starts here with us. I guarantee if our Lord and Savior came and stood before us right now in ALL His heavenly glory, you’d probably straighten up in your seats a bit. You’d probably sing those hymns and speak those words of confession with a little more voice and emotion behind the words. You wouldn’t just muddle through and go through the motions, would you? You’d put your heart and soul into it! You’d probably break open your wallets and purses and dig little deeper. Tragically: We don’t—none of us—at least not as much as we should or could. Those words of Christ: “I am with you always.... Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour,” often go in one ear and out the other, our words and deeds betraying the truth of our complacent foolishness.

Now, does this mean that all hope is lost for us? Are we actually the foolish virgins and the ignorant, hard-headed, apathetic Israelites in today’s Old Testament lesson? Well...we certainly can be at times, can’t we? However, does this mean that all hope is lost for us? Can we only look forward to darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth? No! God’s grace and mercy are greater than our foolish complacency. By His grace, like the five wise virgins, He does enable us to keep our eyes and ears focused on the coming of our heavenly bridegroom. By God’s grace and the working of His Holy Spirit, we do keep our eyes of faith focused on the all-redeeming cross of Jesus Christ—God in the flesh for us and our salvation—though it is, admittedly, sometimes a groggy, half-asleep, complacent gaze.

Through the gifts of Christ’s own Word and Sacraments, our lamps of faith are continually refilled and replenished by Him with His life-giving grace, mercy, and forgiveness. The trick/catch is you have to be here! This is where Christ has promised to freely administer these gifts; to freely and fully fill our lamps with His oil of life and saving faith. Not on the golf course, in the arena, or in bed in front of the TV. Not in some counterfeit store/church that peddles knock-off imitations that give you a false “warm and fuzzy” feeling, while still leaving you empty and ill-prepared and sitting in the dark. This is where the Bridegroom is, and this is where He replenishes, prepares, feeds and nourishes us with His own Word and Sacrament. Right here, right now! Thank be to God for such undeserved mercy and grace!

You know...whenever I read these lessons, I can’t help but think back to the truth of the old adage that we began this sermon with: Complacency truly is deadly. Complacency truly can kill,

far worse than we could ever imagine. May our Lord and Savior continue to grant you the strength, endurance, courage, wisdom and faith to stay vigilant, awake, and actively focused on the life-saving cross of Jesus Christ in all that you say, think, and do. For He alone is our sole source of life, light, and salvation—now and forevermore. May the Lord replenish you and fill you with His life-giving, life-saving Gospel light so as you go about your life in this dark and fallen world which only seems to be getting worse every day, you have nothing to fear and you may always be prepared to joyfully meet your Lord and Master when the time comes. “Amen, come Lord Jesus! Come!” May this be your prayer and your reality, and may this same Gospel light of Christ be witnessed in all that you say, think, and do. May it be witnessed through you, and not in spite of you.

In Jesus name, and to His glory,

Amen.

Feel free to use any or all of this sermon for the edification of God's people.

* This sermon was written by Pastor Jason Zirbel for Pentecost 22, Proper 27, series A. He is the pastor at Grace Lutheran Church, Greenwood, AR. The sermon has been slightly edited. To see the original go to:
<http://lcmssermons.com/index.php?sn=3927>