

Mt 25:1 - 13 The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids
Rev Susan Pickering

Gathering of the People of God

Organ Prelude

Welcome & Notices

Centring Prayer

Let us prepare our hearts and minds for worship,
let us rest in the silence, breathing in the presence of God...

Processional Hymn Your coming Lord TiS 285 verses 1, 3, 4 & 5

Light the Christ Candle

We light this candle as a reminder that Christ is the light of the world.

Call to Worship

We gather in this space,
Preparing our hearts and minds for worship.

God, meet us in this space

We come with our anxieties and fears,
Our doubts and pain –
With all things that keep us awake in the dark night.

God who never sleeps or turns away,
Stay with us in the long lonely hours.

We come to worship God,
prepared to listen,
Prepared to open our hearts and lift our voices in praise.

God, who keeps our lives,
Be with us now,
As we gather to worship you.

Acknowledgment of Country

We recognise that God created heaven and earth, the sea and the sky, and all that is in them.

This land is Holy Ground

Mt 25:1 - 13 The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids
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As we gather we acknowledge the traditional custodians,
the Turrbal and Jagera people, elders, past, present and emerging
We honour them for their custodianship of the land,
on which we gather today.

Introit

Prayer of Thanksgiving & Confession

God of Life,
we come before you with glad hearts,
In this balmy season of Spring.
We witness the blue skies, the cracks of thunder and flashes of light
We witness new life springing around us.
We give thanks and praise for your presence among us.
As we gather and offer praise,
we also bring our prayers of confession,
Acknowledging our human frailty.

We confess, O God
That we gather to hear the stories of Christ,
But often fail to understand how we are to live the Good News.
We live in a world that is ravaged by inequality,
Injustice, and poverty, we hear what needs to be done,
Then add COVID
It's all too hard, what can we do?

We confess, O God
That we witness the impact of climate change,
We see the pollution of oceans and rivers,
Terrible natural disasters as the earth responds to trauma.
In so many ways we continue perpetuating the destruction of your creation.

We confess, O God
That as consumers we participate in industries that exploit,
In a bid for a bargain we fail to acknowledge the human cost.

God of life, have mercy upon us.
Move us to be a people of action,
May your Spirit rekindle our desire for justice.
May our words and actions be of love,

Mt 25:1 - 13 The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids
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Compassion, mercy and peace.

In the name of Christ, AMEN

Words of Assurance

Everyone, the Good News from scripture is that even when we dishonour our relationship with, neighbour, planet and God in the most fundamental of ways, God still loves us, when we turn back to God and repent, we are forgiven and in forgiveness we are set free.

Thanks be to God.

Doxology TiS 747 The Lord is my Light

Service of the Word

Readings

1st reading 1 Thess 4:13 - 18

2nd reading Matt 25:1 - 13

This is the Living Word

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Anthem

Message

Our parable this morning is unique to the Gospel of Matthew, the surface call is to stay awake, simple, alas you know as well as I do there has to be more to this reading. I've mentioned before that parables are open ended, rather than answers, parables are an invitation to enter and engage.¹ Like a key they provide us with an opportunity to unlock mysteries, they provoke and inspire us to ask the questions about how we live in community, what really matters, how do we live as disciples?²

Today's parable follows on from the 'apocalyptic teachings in the previous chapter,'³ so teaching that provides some details about signs of the end times before the parousia - the return of Christ. It's suggested the delay of the parousia caused a few problems and that by around 50 C.E. some of Pauls' converts were

¹ Levine

² Levine

³ Anderson in Feasting on the Gospels

Mt 25:1 - 13 The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

Rev Susan Pickering

getting a little restless.⁴ So what do we do with this delay 2000+ years on?

The use of wedding imagery isn't new, In Isaiah⁵ God declares God's self to be Israels husband, in Jeremiah,⁶ Israel's unfaithfulness is declared from the perspective of a husband. Wedding imagery is used throughout the New Testament, only recently we had the Parable of the Wedding Banquet.⁷ There are references throughout the New Testament to Jesus being the bridegroom, this is imagery that hints at the messiahship, which of course has been a central issue since Jesus arrived in Jerusalem.⁸

This parable begins with 'then' the kingdom of heaven will be like this...it's future tense, we're engaging with the now and not yet. We have 5 wise bridesmaids and 5 foolish bridesmaids. The Greek term here is actually Παρθενοῖς (Parthenois) which translates more accurately to virgins or young women, so more basically we're probably looking at young women of marriageable age. The 'contrasting of wisdom and folly' grounds this parable in the Jewish tradition, Proverbs being a great example as we encounter wisdom and folly personified in the form of woman.⁹ As for the scene itself, there's not a huge amount of information about wedding customs of the time,¹⁰ what I did find was a suggestion that in Galilean culture, when the bridegroom turned up, 'the bridesmaids would accompany the wedding party with lamps and torches from the brides house to that of the groom where celebrations would begin.'¹¹

So the wise took extra oil, the foolish didn't, the bridegroom is delayed, not a little, but a lot, and all 10 nod off. It's midnight when they're woken by a shout, it's on, the bridegroom is here. Up they all get, the wise prepare their lamps and the foolish ask the wise to share their oil, but no, there's not enough. Now let's just sit with that - it seems to fly int he face of what it is to be a disciple, the wise seem to be operating out of a place of scarcity, that goes against the idea of abundance, what about the call to love neighbour, feed the hungry, have faith - it jars me that they won't share, where's the compassion? The unity? The sisterhood?

⁴ Ott in Feasting on the Gospels

⁵ Is 54:5

⁶ Jer 31: 32

⁷ Matt 22:1-14

⁸ Wright

⁹ Wright

¹⁰ Byrne

¹¹ Anderson in Feasting on the Gospels

Mt 25:1 - 13 The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids
Rev Susan Pickering

This is one of those moments where we must face that there is more within this parable, there has to be! And so we must go on and continue to be provoked and challenged.

Anyhoo the foolish pop off to, obviously the ancient version of 7/11 or Nightowl, to get some oil, on their return the feast has commenced, the door is closed. The call out, yet they are denied entry and are told 'I do not know you.'¹² The parable wraps up with Jesus declaring; 'Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.'¹³ Another challenge!

They are denied entry, what sort of kingdom is this? I guess that's one of the questions we must wrestle with, how do we understand the kingdom? The Kingdom of heaven is now and not yet, begun yet not complete. I like the way Crossan puts it, the 'kingdom is power and rule, it's a process much more than a place, a way of life much more than a location.'¹⁴ The kingdom of heaven is under divine rule and is ultimately, 'what the world would be if God were directly and immediately in charge.'¹⁵

The falling asleep isn't the issue, all 10 fall asleep and in reality sleep deprivation is torture. The lack of oil is symbolic, pointing beyond, pointing us to consider what it means to be prepared, to be disciples. I'd like to suggest again that we look to the Sermon on the Mount,¹⁶ which includes the beatitudes,¹⁷ the call to be salt and light,¹⁸ teachings concerning anger,¹⁹ retaliation,²⁰ the scandalous and radical call to love enemies.²¹ It includes the warnings of serving two masters,²² judging others,²³ the golden rule.²⁴ Again just the other week we heard Jesus declare the

¹² Matthew 25:11-12

¹³ Matthew 25:13

¹⁴ Crossan

¹⁵ Crossan

¹⁶ Matthew 5 - 7

¹⁷ Matthew 5:1-12

¹⁸ Matthew 5:13-16

¹⁹ Matthew 5:21-26

²⁰ Matthew 5:38-42

²¹ Matthew 5:43-48

²² Matthew 6:24

²³ Matthew 7:1-5

²⁴ Matthew 7:12

Mt 25:1 - 13 The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

Rev Susan Pickering

greatest commandment, Love God followed by the second, love your neighbour as yourself, the two inseparable.²⁵

As disciples we are called to be prepared, this is far more than a set of beliefs. I thought about the 5 who called out; "Lord, lord, open to us."²⁶ Now this got me thinking about the gospel reading for last week, the one I would have preached on had I not gone down the All Saints Day route. In that reading Jesus tells the crowds "do whatever they teach you and follow it but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach."²⁷ Jesus goes on to say they do what they do to be seen by others, making reference to their appearance, wanting the best seats, expecting respect and wanting people to call them rabbi. He concludes with, 'But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them.'²⁸ I thought about people who are quick to say they are 'Christian,' they maybe turn up at church fairly regularly, maybe even have a fish sticker on their car, and ask what would Jesus do? Yet in their living they discard the demands of discipleship, their living becomes a block for others to see what discipleship is actually about after all we are justified by faith right? Thing is we're reminded in James, 'faith without works is also dead.'²⁹ The reality is that our faith ought to motivate us to the works.

Ultimately being prepared is much more than a catchphrase for the scouts, it's about a way of life, it's about taking responsibility, it's living life by the standards of the kingdom, the sermon on the mount. To live faithfully calls us to embrace the counter cultural way of Jesus, the economy of God which is vastly different to the economy of the world. Jesus' life and ministry was about preparing people for the in-breaking of the kingdom of heaven,³⁰ as disciples we are called to carry on that preparation, to carry on the works. We are called to speak out against hate with words of love, to welcome and sit and eat with all, to participate in bringing about justice for the whole of creation in a world ravished with injustice.

It seems appropriate to mention that this is the Sunday closest to remembrance day, the day in 1918 upon which the gunfire ceased, millions of people had lost their lives. I mention this as a reminder that war will never bring about peace, only more destruction. Albert Einstein said; 'Peace is not merely the absence of war but

²⁵ Matthew 22:34-40

²⁶ Matthew 25:11

²⁷ Matthew 23:3

²⁸ Matthew 23:13

²⁹ James 2:26b

³⁰ Levine

Mt 25:1 - 13 The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

Rev Susan Pickering

the presence of justice, of law, of order--in short, of government.³¹ As disciples of Jesus the government we are to seek is the rule of the divine One, we are to work for the kind of world that would be, if under the divine rule of God.

Staying awake alerts us to the active nature of our life as disciples. Preparing for a wedding can be stressful, so much to coordinate, so much to do, well likewise the life of discipleship calls us to much work, because it's about refusing the status quo and being determined to strive and work constantly for a world where no-one is devalued, oppressed or exploited, it's seeking creative and non-violent responses to conflict, it's refusing hate in all its forms, it's working to create a world that is driven by compassion and love, a world that is filled with light, it is refusing to cease until the kingdom of God is established on earth.

Prayer

Holy One, we hear the challenge of the call, it's not an easy one! Send your Spirit upon us, may she speak to us her wisdom, may we listen for the challenges and dare to respond fearlessly in faith and love. May we be your people working to establish your kingdom on earth. Amen

Hymn Come, Living God

Prayers for the People:

As a sign of sacred unity, we join together in the prayer;

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Peace

Sending Forth the People of God

Hymn: Beauty for Brokenness TiS 690 verses 1, 2, 3 and 5

³¹ <http://jupiter.plymouth.edu/~lsandy/peacedef.html>

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Words of Mission & Blessing

Let us leave this place,
Our light visible to the world,
Our lives reflecting the work of Jesus,
Let us be prepared,
Let us continue to work until the Kingdom of God is established on earth for all to see.

May the blessing of God grant us visions and dreams that inspire us,
May the blessing of Christ be the light that guides us,
and may the blessing of the Holy Spirit, Woman Wisdom, be the flame that burns within us, never to be extinguished. Amen

Recession: Shalom to You

Postlude

Sources

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