



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

Be Prepared

Matthew 25:1-13

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Good morning, it is great to be back here this morning to bring you the word of God.

Well I think you would agree that this 2020 has certainly been a very crazy year?

With all the upheaval of Covid-19, as well as Brexit, Prince Harry and Megan, Massive Fires in Australia, and in America, then of course, we had all the political upheavals with the General elections here and in the United States. I don't know about you folk, but for me, time appears to have just flown by faster than usual. It reminds me of a scene out of the television program "Fawlty Towers", where Basil says, "Whoosh, what was that? Oh, that was my life".

It is also hard to comprehend that in three weeks from today, on Sunday the 29th, we will be celebrating the First Sunday in Advent and begin to look forward to celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. With that of course comes all the family preparations, church service preparations and then there is the annual struggle in figuring out what presents to buy, and for whom. Last week I even started making a Christmas gift list, and remembering to check it twice, I am just getting prepared.

When we had the first lock-down with Covid-19, we had to rearrange our lives, our work, our travels, our schools were urgently developing ways to teach online and of course we had to quickly learn how to present our church services on line, Vestry meetings on line, Alpha on line and we all saw the rapid success with a little known programme called "Zoom".

Everything we were doing and were wanting to do, had to fall into line with all of the Covid-19 restrictions, it was a bit of a wake up call to us all, lots of life adjustments, then when Auckland went into the next lockdown we were prepared and all went quite smoothly, and now we are prepared for any future lockdown and feel secure that our worship to God will carry on, although I wouldn't be a bit surprised if in the words of Bradley Walsh, "We will need a few pushbacks".

The Gospel reading today is all about being prepared, it warns us about what God's judgement will be like and the separating of the faithful from the unfaithful. Matthew wrote his Gospel about 50 years after the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. He struggled with the issue of the delayed Second Coming.

The Groom was late:

Many "first-generation" Christians believed that Jesus would return in their lifetimes, but by the time Matthew wrote his Gospel, 50 years had passed since the Resurrection, and many Christians were beginning to wonder just how long it would take for Jesus to return. In this parable, Matthew encouraged the church to maintain its vigil, even though the people were weary of maintaining an "alert status."

This reading from Matthew 25:1-13, which is known as the "Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins" and also known as the "Parable of the 10 Bridesmaids", emphasizes the importance of being prepared for Christ's return.

The Wedding:

In this Gospel, we hear Jesus describe preparations for a wedding.

In biblical times, weddings provided much needed relief from the humdrum and hard work of daily life. It was the norm for the women to take care of the children and to attend to all the household chores. So understandably, they eagerly looked forward to any small distraction, such as their daily visit to the village water well, where they could visit and socialise with other village women.

Occasionally, their tedium was broken by the great events of village life--weddings, births, and bar mitzvahs--even funerals.

Of these, weddings involved the greatest celebration. At a wedding, the couple was the centre of village life for days on end. After the ceremony, there was feasting, dancing, and partying, which could last for several days. For the couple, it was "the happiest week in all their lives". It was a happy week for their friends as well--an event not to be missed!

An important part of the wedding ceremony in biblical times, was the procession from the home of the bride's parents to the couple's new home. The bridegroom would go to the Bride's home and collect his Bride and escort her to the wedding ceremony that was to be held at their new home. Their pathway was lit by 10 specially chosen Bridesmaids, who surrounded the couple, probably 3 either side and two at the front and two at the back. They processed with the Bride and Groom, lighting the way by lifting up flaming torches, almost certainly long sticks wrapped with oily rags. These are what are referred to in this scripture as lamps.

A wedding was a great thrill for all the members of the community, but especially so for the young women who had been invited by the Bride's parents, to serve as the bride's attendants.

It was an incredibly special honour for a young woman to be asked to participate, and those who agreed were required and expected to do so enthusiastically and responsibly. The young women were expected to be ready, because the bridegroom's coming signalled the beginning of a great and exuberant festival--something that promised to be one of the highlights of these young women's lives. They were expected to be prepared.

The Oil:

When looking through various commentaries, I found that there are various opinions to what the oil represents. Some say it is the Holy Spirit whereas some say it represents works. I conclude that both are correct and that the oil signifies our works to further the Kingdom of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In this parable, the oil certainly represents the Holy Spirit. The foolish bridesmaids are those who have not truly been saved, they have not been filled with the Holy Spirit.

Let us look at Verse 8 and 9

(8) The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

(9) 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

The foolish bridesmaids did not understand that they had to have their own source of oil / Holy Spirit. Believers cannot just give the Holy Spirit (i.e. share the oil) to unbelievers. We all individually must receive and be filled the Holy Spirit from God.

Then in verses 10 through to 12.

(10) "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

(11) "Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!'

(12) "But he replied, 'Truly I tell you; I don't know you.'

Too late:

The foolish bridesmaids were left behind; the door to eternal life was shut.

Each person, that is every one of us, must receive salvation for himself or herself before it is too late. God's judgment is undeniable and irreversible. We cannot know Christian assurance without the Holy Spirit.

The Bride

The bride in this parable is the church. In fact, the church is referred to in Scripture as "the bride of Christ." Over 14 times. Just like a bride and groom must be ready for the wedding, the church as the bride of Christ must be ready for him when he comes.

As Christians we are all part of the church, so we must be ready for his return. We must keep our lamps fed with the oil of the Holy Spirit. We must see that we are continually growing in the love of God and service to others.

So, what does it mean for us to keep our lamps fed?

Be Prepared and faithful:

Being prepared--having oil--means Accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour and asking to be filled with his Holy Spirit and committing your life to working faithfully for the Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Being prepared also means practicing good stewardship--developing good environmental habits--careful management of time and money--generosity to those in need--and spreading the Gospel of Christ throughout our community and families, the possibilities go on and on.

Being prepared--having oil--means generosity to those in need. Jesus makes it clear that he has expectations regarding our behaviour--standards that we must take seriously--obedience to which we must aspire. In this parable, he also makes it clear that there is a time for repentance and a time when repentance will be too late.

Being faithful is the meaning of being prepared / waiting for the Lord to come.

Being faithful and prepared for the Lord, can also include volunteering for activities within our church of St Stephens. There are many opportunities to help our St Stephen's family, including volunteering to help in our Op Shop. Even if it is for a few hours a month it would be an enormous help. If you feel the Lord is prompting you in any way, please see me or any of the vestry members.

We are called to be faithful to God and obey him.

Conclusion:

This is so vitally important, let me repeat, "Being faithful" means **Be prepared**, it is also the meaning of "waiting for the Lord to come." There will be **no** second chances when Christ returns. God is **not** being rude when he denies entrance to the foolish bridesmaids.

We as Christians must **always** be filled with the oil of the holy spirit and be a lamp that shines the light of Christ to the world, so through our faith, we can lead others to Christ.

God's word says that those who really want to join in the festivities, **will** come prepared. We must **always** be prepared for the Lord to return, because he could return at **any** time. We do **not** know the exact date and time when he will return, but we **do** know that Christ has promised great happiness to those who are **prepared** for his return and grave consequences for those who are **not** prepared.

So, are you prepared?

Amen

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

1 “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise.

3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them.

4 The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.

5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

6 “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

7 “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.

8 The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

9 “No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

10 “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

11 “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’

12 “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you; I don’t know you.’

13 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Amos 5:18 - 24

18 Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light. ¹⁹It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. ²⁰Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light- pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness? ²¹“I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. ²²Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. ²³Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. ²⁴ but let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!

1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 18

13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵According to the LORD's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the LORD, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the LORD himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds

to meet the LORD in the air. And so we will be with the LORD forever. ^18Therefore encourage one another with these words.