

Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 8th November 2020

Wisdom of Solomon 6.12-16; Psalm 70; 1 Thessalonians 4.13-end; Matthew 25.1-13

Well here we are in a new national lockdown facing a difficult winter. Whatever our views about how this latest lockdown has been organised, the grim fact is that, for whatever reason, Covid-19 is proving more difficult to keep at bay than expected. On this Remembrance Sunday when we remember with gratitude those who have given their lives for the nation in war, we also remember the horror, the unpredictability and the fog of war. And these same things are evident to some extent in the battle against Covid-19 too.

And the keys to victory are the same too: national fortitude, common purpose, loyalty, discipline. And this in spite of the mistakes of those who lead us, in spite of the conflicting information, in spite of the confusion. War is sometimes described as organised chaos. This doesn't seem so very different. Our leaders are, I am sure, generally doing their best, and it is worth asking ourselves whether if we were having to grapple with all the complexities and pressures, whether any of us would actually do any better. This doesn't of course mean that constructive criticism and debate isn't vital.

We all have to be ready to do our best in the circumstances, and to work together in whatever ways are needed, and to support one another in our frustrations and depressions. And when we do this, there will also be many times of surprising joy and hope and friendship. We should be ready to enjoy those times lest they pass us by, and our Gospel reading today is about just this sort of thing.

It is a parable set in the drama of a wedding celebration, and its teaching is that we need to be ready for the party, ready for God's Kingdom. We need to be ready for when the opportunities come to take part in God's kingdom, and not let them pass by. Otherwise in a very real way, we miss out.

It is a mistake to think of this parable as being just about being ready for the great return of Jesus at the end of the age. Indeed the general Christian expectation of being ready for Jesus to return is actually a kind of grand parable in itself. There is no difference between being ready for Jesus' return and being ready here and now to be part of the Kingdom of God. The opportunities for new life and new hope and new kindness and new generosity are in fact all around us. We just have to notice them, and be ready for them, and be ready to join the party.

Part of the teaching of the parable of the wise and foolish girls, is that in order to be ready, we actually have to be ready for the long haul. We have to take the trouble to resource ourselves for the long haul, rather than just living for the moment. It's about a kind of spiritual investment, investing in knowing Jesus, practising being people of prayer, learning the habits of kindness and generosity. This is what the reserves of lamp oil in the parable are about. So that we can have the resilience to stay the course.

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And with this spiritual investment, and with this resilience, we can think ahead. With hope. And with expectation. And with faith. And we will be ready for whatever it is that God want to do with us and for us. One of the marks of a faithful Christian community is that it is always hopeful.

So let us be hopeful, let's invest in the spiritual reserves we need as we face this difficult winter and all its attendant disappointments. God is faithful and he remains ready to meet us in so many ways. Let us be ready to notice when God is at work, despite the gloom, and be ready to join in. Amen.

CJ. 8.11.20