

ST PAUL'S CHURCH (RONDEBOSCH)

SUNDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2020

TWENTY THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

READINGS: JOSHUA 24:1-3A, 14-25//PSALM 78:1-7 //

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18// MATTHEW 25:1-13

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**O God light of the minds that know you
Life of the souls that love you
And strength of the thoughts that seek you
Bless the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts
AMEN**

We spend our lives in preparation. As children, we crawl in preparation for walking. We babble in preparation for talking. Then we go to pre-school and primary school to prepare for high school. Our matriculants prepared themselves for their final exams which started on Thursday 5 November to prepare for college and university. We prepare meals. We prepare for our Church services. We prepare ourselves for interviews. We are now preparing for the Advent season, Christmas and the holidays. Almost everything we do is in preparation for something else. As our lives are filled with preparations for the activities of this life, a life that may only last for 60, 70 80 or if we are lucky a hundred years, Our Lord Jesus calls us to be vigilant in our preparations for his second coming. (for eternal life).

Our gospel passage this morning is a very well-known story of the 10 bridesmaids (10 virgins) waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom. This parable comes in the context of a string of parables all dedicated to the same theme or similar teaching on a similar theme: *that of being watchful as we wait for the return of the Messiah.*

Jesus wants His disciples and us to know that He will come back again. Jesus is saying be prepared, expect my return. He speaks these words, *“Therefore keep watch, (be prepared for my coming// be on your guard), you do not know the day or the hour (when I will come).*

*What does it means to be watchful, to be on our guard,
It means to be prepared – to make preparations for my coming*

1. Being prepared means obeying Jesus' teachings and strengthening our relationship with God

Does it mean we cancel our insurance policies? Do we stop paying into our pension scheme? Does it mean we sell our house and give it all away? Do we resign from our jobs and spend all day in prayer. That is certainly not what Jesus is advocating here. The preparation Jesus is talking about is ***spiritual preparation*** not only for us but also for our loved ones and for our neighbour.

We live such busy lives. We are busy 24/7 and our prayer time or Bible study are last on our "to do list". (Yes the COVID 19 pandemic and the Lockdown period has forced us to reflect on our Spiritual life and we even started to do regularly bible studies and quiet time and reflections.)

However I am the first one to confess that I have return back to my old business. My family say they hardly spend time with me. I am always at church and if I am at home I am busy on my laptop.

So how do we prepare ourselves (How do we make preparations?)

In Matthew 25 v 2 we read "***five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise however took oil in jars along with their lamps***"

The difference between the wise and foolish virgins (bridesmaids) is that the wise had enough oil for their lamps, the foolish did not. Here we learn that five of these virgins forgot to bring any extra oil. They had their lamps but forgot their jars filled with oil. The oil represents something very significant that no Christian should be without.

What is the meaning of the oil?. Both the foolish and the wise were prepared to one degree or another. They all brought lamps. But some of them prepared better than others and brought not only a lamp, but also a jar filled with oil. The wise bridesmaids (virgins) were prepared because they had enough oil to get them through the night. The foolish bridesmaids (virgins) were unprepared. They had a lamp, which would last them a few minutes or so, but it was not enough. They lacked reserves of spiritual oil. They did not prepare well enough.

Similarly, if you and I are not willing to take the time and expense and build up our spiritual reserves while we have the chance, we will not be able to persevere while we wait and we will give up

A time may come when a crisis happens in our life – a sickness, a death, a loss of finances or a job, or persecution – and we will find that we do not have the spiritual reserves to get through. In such times, we may look at those who made it through similar trials and say, "I wish I had your faith. How did you get so

much faith? Can't you give me some of your spiritual strength?" And of course, they cannot. Faith and spiritual strength comes only through day by day discipline. It comes only through constant reading and studying of the Word. It comes only through praying without ceasing.

To keep watch, to be on our guard, to be prepared for the coming of Jesus Christ we need to build up our spiritual reserves by setting time aside every day to spend alone with Jesus. To have our personal quiet time to pray read our Bible and meditate and reflect on God's word. To try to regularly partake in the Holy Eucharist. To strengthen our personal relationship with God.

Secondly being prepared means working faithfully for the Lord.

In preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ we must think and reflect on how we can help others be ready to meet with Christ. Perhaps it is more about sharing Christ with others in word and in deed. Perhaps it is more about modelling a relationship with Jesus to our children, or to those we work with, or to those who work for us. Perhaps it is more about reaching out to those in need so that they can experience the redeeming love of God in their own lives through our compassion and our care.

As we wait do we share God's love with those in need?

I shared with you last week the stories of the young people who reached out and helped other children and young people in need.

But let me tell you another story

Author Terry Muck tells of a letter he received from a man who used to have absolutely no interest in spiritual things. He lived next door to a Christian, and they had a casual relationship like neighbours often do. Then the non-Christian's wife was diagnosed with cancer, and died three months later. Here's the letter:

"I was in total despair. I went through the funeral preparations and the service like I was in a trance. And after the service I went to the path along the river and walked all night. But I did not walk alone. My neighbour - afraid for me, I guess - stayed with me all night.

He did not speak; he did not even walk beside me. He just followed me. When the sun finally came up over the river he came over to me and said, "Let's go get some breakfast."

I go to church now. My neighbour's church. A religion that can produce the kind of caring and love my neighbour showed me is something I want to find out more about. I want to be like that. I want to love and be loved like that for the rest of my life."

What made the difference in this man's life? It was that one Christian dared to make the most of the opportunity he had to reveal Christ to his friend. There were few words . . . but the message came through. He had learned how to **HOW TO MAKE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY.**

How about you and me? Do we see the hurt and brokenness in our society in our community or even in our own St Paul's family? Do we reach out to the vulnerable, the lonely the aged, the depressed, those who are different from us in our Parish?

CONCLUSION

"One day a court jester said something so foolish that the king, handing him a staff said to him 'take this and keep it until you find a bigger fool than yourself. Some years later the king was very ill and lay on his deathbed. The king addressing those gathered around his bed said. 'I am about to leave you. I am going on a very long journey and I shall not return to this place so I have called you to say goodbye"

Then the jester stepped forward and addressed the king saying "Your majesty may I ask you a question? When you journeyed abroad visiting your people staying with your nobles or paying diplomatic visits to other kings, your heralds and servants always went before you making preparations for you. May I ask what preparations your majesty has made for this journey you are about to take? Alas he said I have made no preparations

Then said the jester "take this staff with you, for now I found a bigger fool than myself ."AMEN

(In the courts of kings and queens in medieval Europe, the jester was the person whose job was to do silly things in order to make people laugh.)