

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

When I read this text, I'm left with questions. What questions arise from today's gospel reading?
What things do we need to explore to help us understand it?

Am I prepared?

What makes some wise and some foolish?

What is the Oil?

When will Jesus Christ return?

Why didn't the wise virgins share with the foolish?

As I was preparing early in the week I wondered about this wedding practice, what is the purpose of these ten young women and how can we communicate that today? Their purpose was to sit and wait, and when the time was right, light the way for the Groom to come and meet or celebrate with his bride. They might have to sit and wait hours, days or weeks and they don't know when the groom returns.

Have you ever heard stories of novel ways to light airstrips at night for the RFDS to land in outback Australia? Here is one, that shows the importance of being prepared to light the way;

Sometimes in the outback, you have to make do.

It would be ideal, Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) pilot Geoff Cobden said, if every station in Queensland's remote northwest were equipped with flares to line the runway in case a medical emergency required them to land in the dark.

Most stations do, these days. But about 10 times a year, pilots need to organise an alternative form of lighting.

"Basically if we are going to a station that doesn't have flares handy, dunny-roll landings would be the next best option," Cobden said.

A dunny-roll landing is when the runway is lined with diesel-soaked toilet rolls – about 20 of them for a 1,000m runway, spaced 100m apart – which are then set alight.

"They burn quite well, actually, for about half an hour," Cobden said. "Most places in the bush have got at least 20 toilet rolls.

"Outback Australians are pretty resourceful. You have got to use what you have got on hand."

It is still considered a regulation landing, so long as the toilet rolls are correctly spaced. If toilet rolls are not an option, Cobden said, they can land using the headlights of four cars positioned at each corner of the runway, but that is not a regulation landing and can be used only as a last resort.

Flaming toilet rolls are better.

Lighting the way for the medical plane is the task for the station and they've found what we might consider innovative, lighting the way for the groom is the task for the young ladies in our parable. The practice of sitting and waiting is understood by the first listeners; they've had sisters, friends, or family, or they have participated in lighting the way for a bridegroom as he comes to meet his bride. They understand the need to be prepared, the wait and that the primary task is to keep the bridegroom and his party safe as they are ushered into the marriage feast. It would be no good if those wise virgins shared their oil with the foolish ones at the last minute because then none of them would have been able to complete the set task, all the lamps would have gone out. The groom, his party and the virgins would have been stumbling around in the dark!

Although these details are interesting and are needed to grasp the full concept of the parable and may be a little humorous, they are periphery. They are not the main point. The main point that Jesus needs us to understand; ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. Matthew 25:13 (ESV)

Jesus wants and needs us to be prepared for his return and to be confident that we will be with him. We are going to see this theme repeated over the coming weeks. This parable is not delivered, recorded, and preserved so that you would feel self-conscious about your faith, or your preparedness for Christ's return, or nervous that you might be one of the foolish ones. This parable is here so that you would be prepared, watching and ready for his return, lighting the way into the marriage feast of the lamb!

What is the difference between the wise and the foolish virgins?

The foolish don't prepare so, at the curial moment they panic buy; remember panic buying in 2020, toilet paper. People panic buy because they have no faith, they panic and look for something to substitute for faith. The wise had a packet of toilet paper in the linen press and didn't need to buy it for weeks. The wise had plenty of oil on hand.

Elsewhere in the bible wisdom is described as knowledge of God, which might give us a good pointer, the wise ones know God and, better still are known by God. They don't just know about him, they know he's going to take a long time to return, and they will be ready when he does because they believed him when he said he would return. Just like the young girls believed the groom when he said he would return later, the wise people of God believe that Christ will return to take us to his feast. This parable is a warning to us, a warning not to ignore the things of God, but to continue to listen to his word because we believe that through hearing his word he shows us his great deeds so that we believe the things he promises to us. Faith. The wise virgins had faith.

The foolish ones tried to join in the celebration, they went through all the rituals of waiting and watching, but they didn't have faith. They didn't believe they would have to wait that long; they had no idea about who God is and what he has done because they were not prepared for the long hard journey. They just went through the motions never letting the word touch them or change them, they heard about the great deeds of God but didn't believe that they were for them.

The foolish ones didn't receive what was on offer and therefore had nothing to sustain them, maybe they even fell from faith. They didn't believe Jesus' words when he said he was coming soon. They saw that it had been a long time, too long waiting and decided that maybe he wasn't coming at all. They didn't receive the words that were given to them, when Jesus returns instead of lighting his way into the feast they will have run off to the shops to panic buy toilet paper to light his way, or freezers to store their food for the zombie apocalypse, instead of being with him in the feast.

The foolish live for today, and never consider that it is the one on which Jesus will return, they are not and do not prepare, they are not watching and waiting. They don't do anything to sustain themselves body and soul to eternal life, or if they do they go through the motions without believing it is doing them any good. The wise are always eating a little more, filling up their flask, reading, memorising, praying, confessing, and turning from fear, love and trust of things in this world to fear love and trust of the one true God.

The foolish are not known to God, 'I never knew you', he says! Ouch! The wise are known, they are children of the king, there are sons of God, they are saints, they are guarded by Christ Jesus, they are guests at the feast, marked with the sign of the Holy cross, receiving his gifts that strengthen and preserve them to eternal life, they are encouraged by Jesus words.

The wise can get through all difficult circumstances of life because their oil jars are full of their prepared sustenance. They have his word, their daily devotions, they regularly receive the sacrament (to fill them up), they have their hymn book handy, they find God's word through pastors and teachers in new media like YouTube and podcasts, they daily remember their baptism, they cross themselves, hear God's love for them in the creed... it is difficult, no one says it was easy, but the years of sitting in the pew, receiving his gifts, prepares them.

These things that God gives us, delivers us from, and feeds us with; are the same things that make us prepared. His gifts to the church of word and sacrament. His body and blood poured out on the cross and delivered to us in His Word, his waters, his Cup and Bread so that we are prepared and known by him when he returns.

He wants us to be confident, assured and joyful that we belong to him and that he will return soon. Look at the hymns we had to choose from today (some we sung), hopefully, they convey this joy and confidence.

"I know that my redeemer lives!"
He lives and grants me daily breath;
He lives and I shall conquer death;
He lives my mansion to prepare,
He lives to bring me safely there. (LHS 103)

Midnight hears the welcome voices,
And at the thrilling cry rejoices:
O where are you, ye virgins wise?
The bridegroom comes, awake!
Your lamps with gladness take.
Hallelujah!
With bridal care
Yourselves prepare
To meet the bridegroom, who is near. (LHS 487)

Rejoice, rejoice, believers,
And let your lights appear;
The evening is advancing,
And darker night is near.
The bridegroom is arising
And soon He draweth nigh;
Up, pray and watch and wrestle,
At midnight comes the cry. (LHS 489)

O Son of God, we wait for Thee,
We long for Thine appearing;
We know Thou sittest on the throne,
And we Thy name are bearing.
Who trusts in Thee
May joyful be,
And see Thee, Lord, descending
To bring us bliss unending. (LHS 490)

We don't know when Jesus will return, but we know he will return and once those who are dead have risen from the grave, he will take all believers to be with him for eternity. He calls us to be alert and ready, prepared to meet him at any moment; because we are more than known to him, we belong to him, we are his, and he has placed his mark on us. In the meantime, using his gifts; word, absolution, baptism, and Lord's supper to keep our oil full so that when he comes, we are not panic buying at the shop, trying to get last-minute things prepared, but in that instant, we are ushered into the marriage feast with our King. Being known by Jesus makes you prepared! You are known by Jesus, you are prepared, watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all our understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen