Sermon And Readings 24th Sunday After Pentecost 8th November 2026

Joshua 24.1–3a, 24.14–25

1 Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the
elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented
themselves before God. 2 And Joshua said to all the people, 'Thus says the LORD,
the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and
Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. 3 Then I took your
father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of
Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac; 14 'Now therefore revere
the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that
your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt and serve the LORD. 15 Now
if you are unwilling to serve the Lord , choose this day whom you will serve,
whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the
gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my
household, we will serve the Lord .' 16 Then the people answered, 'Far be it from
us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; 17 for it is the Lord our
God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the
house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us
along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we
passed; 18 and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who
lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.' 19 But
Joshua said to the people, 'You cannot serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He
is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. 20 If you
forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and
consume you, after having done you good.' 21 And the people said to Joshua,
'No, we will serve the Lord!' 22 Then Joshua said to the people, 'You are
witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord , to serve him.' And
they said, 'We are witnesses.' 23 He said, 'Then put away the foreign gods that
are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.' 24 The
people said to Joshua, 'The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will
obey.' 25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made
statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

Psalm 78.1-7

1 Give heed to my teaching, O my people:
incline your ears to the words of my mouth;
2 For I will open my mouth in a parable:
and expound the mysteries of former times.
3 What we have heard and known:
what our forebears have told us,
4 We will not hide from their children, but declare to a generation yet to come:
the praiseworthy acts of the Lord, his mighty and wonderful works.
5 He established a law in Jacob and made a decree in Israel:
which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children,
6 That future generations might know, and those yet unborn:
that they in turn might teach it to their children;
7 So that they might put their confidence in God:
and not forget his works, but keep his commandments,

1 Thessalonians 4.9–18

9 Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; 10 and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more, 11 to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, 12 so that you may behave properly towards outsiders and be dependent on no one. 13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. 15 For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. 16 For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Matthew 25.1–13

1 ‘Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps
and went to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were
wise. 3 When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; 4 but the
wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5 As the bridegroom was delayed, all of
them became drowsy and slept. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, “Look!
Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.” 7 Then all those bridesmaids
got up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of
your oil, for our lamps are going out.” 9 But the wise replied, “No! there will not
be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for
yourselves.” 10 And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those
who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was
shut. 11 Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, “Lord, lord, open to
us.” 12 But he replied, “Truly I tell you, I do not know you.” 13 Keep awake
therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Sermon

Have you ever got to the airport and realised your passport is at home? There is nothing anyone can do. Your friend can’t lend you theirs, and the airline can’t wave you through. Some things must be ready before the moment comes, and when the moment comes it is too late to get them. This happened to my uncle Gary, and he had to join family he next day…and of course it cost him $$’s.

That is the heart of Jesus’ parable today, and I think it is the thread that runs through all four of our readings.

Ten bridesmaids wait for a bridegroom who is late. All ten fall asleep, and the parable doesn’t condemn them for that. The difference between wise and foolish is not who stayed awake. It is who had oil in reserve when the night turned out to be longer than expected.

When the cry goes up at midnight, the foolish ask the wise to share. The wise say no, and it sounds harsh. But notice what the parable is saying: some things cannot be handed over at the last minute. Trust in God, a habit of prayer, a heart shaped by love are not like a jar of oil you can pour into someone else’s lamp. They are grown over time, and each person must tend their own.

This is a parable about delay. The bridegroom takes longer than anyone anticipated. Matthew was writing for a church that had hoped Christ would return soon and was learning to wait. The question is not only “Are you ready?” but “Are you ready for the long haul?”

And today we hear about Joshua, who stands at Shechem, at the end of his life, and puts the question to the people: “Choose this day whom you will serve.” They answer eagerly, “We will serve the LORD!” And Joshua, strangely, pushes back: “You are not able to serve the LORD.” He is not trying to discourage them. He knows that enthusiasm in the moment is not the same as faithfulness over years.

The people were the children and grandchildren of those who left Egypt. They had inherited a story, but an inherited story is not yet their own faith. Joshua insists that they say it for themselves, and he sets up a stone as a witness so they cannot forget they said it.

Many of us are in the same position. We may have been baptised as babies, brought to church by parents or grandparents, taught the creed before we understood it. That is a gift. But at some point, the question comes to each of us as it came to Israel: will you serve God? Not “did your family?” but “will you?” Inherited faith is the lamp. Chosen faith is the oil.

So how does oil get into a lamp? Psalm 78 gives part of the answer: we tell it. “We will not hide from their children but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD.” Faith is passed on by one generation telling the next what God has done.

That is not only a task for clergy or Sunday school teachers. It is the grandmother who prays aloud at the table, the parent who says “Let’s thank God” when things go well and “Let’s ask God” when they don’t, and the friend who admits, “I couldn’t have got through that without my faith.” Each of these is a small act of filling someone’s lamp, and of filling your own, because the more you tell the story, the more you remember it is true.

If the oil is built up over time, what is it made of? Paul gives two ingredients in our reading from Thessalonians. The first is love. He says the Thessalonians already love one another, and he urges them to do so “more and more.” Love is not a feeling that arrives on its own. It is practised in ordinary, unglamorous

ways: leading a quiet life, minding your own affairs, working with your hands, and showing up for one another.

The second is hope. The Thessalonians were grieving, and they were anxious about those who had died before Christ returned. Paul does not tell them not to grieve. He says they should not grieve "as others do who have no hope." Christians grieve, and the grief is real, but it is not the whole story. Because Jesus died and rose again, those who have died in him are not lost. They are held, and we will be gathered with them.

Notice how Paul ends: "Therefore encourage one another with these words." This is not a threat but a comfort. Hope is something we give one another, especially on those long nights.

What this means for us? What do we do with the long wait?

First, we choose again. Like Israel at Shechem, we renew our commitment. This might be as simple as saying quietly in the morning, "Lord, I will serve you today."

Second, we practise the habits that fill the lamp. Worship, Scripture, prayer, generosity, and showing up for our neighbours are not extras for the few. They are the oil for all. No single one of them feels dramatic, but over years they make the difference between a faith that burns through the night and one that flickers out.

Third, we tell the story and encourage one another. We do not keep faith to ourselves. We hand it on to our children, to the newcomer in the pew, to the friend who is grieving.

And *finally, we wait with hope, not fear.* This parable is not meant to terrify us into an uneasy vigilance. Matthew's Gospel tells us the bridegroom is coming, and that is good news. The wedding feast is real, the door will be open, and we are invited. The task is simply to be the sort of people who are ready to go in.

"Keep awake," Jesus says, "for you know neither the day nor the hour." Keeping awake is not about straining our eyes in the dark. It is about living each day as people who belong to the one who is coming: choosing him, telling his story, loving one another, and holding on to hope.

So let us keep our lamps trimmed and our oil topped up, one ordinary day at a time. Amen.