

SERMON NOTES Sunday 24th September 2023

sunnysidechurch

Theme: **Stories Jesus told: The wise and foolish young women**

Passages: **Matthew 25.1-13**

Some of the main themes from the sermon

The parable in context

This story of some girls who fail to plan ahead and get excluded from a wedding celebration comes in a string of stories which explore similar ideas in slightly different ways. Immediately before comes the story of the reliable and wicked slaves (Matt 24.45-51) and immediately after it come the parables of the talents (Matt 25. 14-30) and the sheep and the goats (Matt 25.31-46). All these parables come towards the end of Matthew's Gospel as Jesus, in Jerusalem, faces the crisis that will result in his trial, crucifixion and resurrection.

How the context helps us to understand the parable

Jesus has already, in chapter 24, talked about the crisis that is to come. This complex passage uses Old Testament imagery to help his hearers make sense of what is about to happen. It seems that Jesus is looking forward to three distinct crises. **Firstly**, his own death and resurrection, **secondly** the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem that will happen not long after his death and **thirdly** the end of the present age, when Jesus will finally be acknowledged as Lord.

Being ready for a crisis

If a crisis is coming, then it makes sense to be prepared. That was true for the people of Jesus' time who needed to respond to his offer of forgiveness and fullness of life. It was also true for the people of Jerusalem as the storm clouds were gathering in AD 70. It is true now too because one day Jesus will return and the whole of creation will realise that He is Lord.

What is Jesus' advice

It's all very well warning people of trouble to come. It just doesn't always work. Jesus is using story to make the simple point more vividly. As we laugh at the stupidity of the five girls who didn't bring oil for their lamps and wonder whether the other five might have been more generous, we leave the world of debate and enter the world of imagination. How could they be so stupid? I'd never let that happen to me!

Crises down the ages

For Jesus' hearers in AD 30 the crisis was their personal response to him, as he called them to follow him. Shortly after the crisis was the destruction of their

homes and lives as Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman army. There have been many crises since. We are living through one now.

The constant theme among all the crises

Jesus' death and resurrection changes everything. They demonstrate that we live in a world made and loved by God. God continues to invite us to follow Jesus; to be his people. We, like all people down the ages have a choice. Are we prepared for the crises of our own time or are we not?

21st Century Crises and being prepared.

For people in Ukraine it was an invasion, for people in Morocco it was an earthquake, for people in Libya it was a flood. For us it may be a cancer diagnosis or a heart attack. All lives have crises. The question for all of us is what being prepared means. Are there conversations we need to have, people we need to for give or ask forgiveness from? Are there wrongs that we need to put right? We need to be like the wise young women.

An often forgotten joy of being a follower of Jesus.

Our actions matter. How we live matters. The bridegroom will arrive.

Some questions for thought and discussion this week:

- 1. Talk, if you are able, about the crises in your life and whether and how God has been with you through them.*
- 2. Think about what being prepared, like the five wise young women, means for you.*
 - a. Are there things you need to talk about with others or with God?*
 - b. Are there wrongs you need to put right?*
 - c. Are there people you need to forgive?*
 - d. Are there people whose forgiveness you need to ask for?*
- 3. This feels like a challenging discussion. However we must remember that it stems from a glorious truth: That our actions matter to the God who made us and loves us. How do we talk to other people about difficult Christian truths like the ones we have been looking at?*

Quote for the week.

'A parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from common life, arresting you by its vividness or strangeness. It leaves you in sufficient doubt of its precise meaning to tease you into active thought.'

C H Dodd 'The Parables of the Kingdom'