

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost  
08-11-2020  
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Joshua 24: 1-3a, 14-25 With Joshua's example, the Israelites decide to follow God

Psalms 107: 1-7, 33-37 O my people, hear my teaching.

1 Thessalonians 4: 9-18 Love one another

We have hope in Jesus – He will return

Matthew 25: 1-13 Jesus tells the parable of the 10 bridesmaids.

### Introduction

When I was a curate at Sunnybank in Brisbane, there was a sign with changeable lettering out the front, and in the week before the 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary time the rector put up this sign.

“Keep watch for you don't know the day of my return.”

Today's gospel parable and the reading from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians are on the second coming of Jesus. Let us focus in on both of these readings in the reflection this morning.

### Second Coming

The New Testament tells us that Jesus Christ came into the world in humility, in order to redeem it. It also declares that he will return again, in glory and power, to judge the world at the end of time.

A number of the parables that Jesus tells are of his second coming. They urge us as believers to be vigilant and watchful, in order that we may be fully prepared to greet our Lord on his return.

Today we hear the first of three parables about the coming Kingdom of Heaven. In this first parable we hear in the story of the 10 bridesmaids, about being ready. The customs may be a bit unfamiliar to us, as the bridesmaids in weddings that I've been to are carrying flowers and not lamps, so let's take a closer look at it to see the message Jesus is giving us.

In the tradition of weddings in Jesus day, the bridegroom would go to the bride's house to sign the marriage contract with the bride's father and then the bride and groom would return to the groom's house for the celebration. His household would be waiting to greet him, and form a procession to his house. In the parable we hear today, the initial meeting took longer than expected and five of the ten bridesmaids were not prepared.

In this parable Jesus is letting us know that when he returns we need to be ready. Having their lamps ready in the parable relates to us being spiritually ready to be with God. We are all responsible for our own spiritual condition. Spiritual preparation cannot be bought or borrowed at the last minute. Our relationship with God must be our own. We need to work on our relationship with God now.

So the main emphasis of this parable is to be prepared. To be sure of our relationship with God.

Throughout the New Testament we are given details to shed light on aspects of the second coming. There are a number of events which will precede the second coming. They will include the universal preaching of the Gospel, the outbreak of persecution of Christians, the rise of nominal religion and apostasy, which is the rejection of Christianity, and the appearance of false prophets and the antichrist.

We don't know the precise timing of the second coming. It remains a mystery, known only to the Father. But we do know that it will occur unexpectedly and suddenly, at God's appointed time.

And the bible tells us that many things will happen at the second coming. These will include the raising of the dead, the Judgement of all peoples, the separation of the righteous and the wicked, the final gathering together of the people of God, and the destruction of all evil and opposition to God.

The return of Jesus Christ in Glory is an incentive to us as believers to live in faith, holiness and obedience as we await his return.

### Living for the second coming

I'd like to talk a little now on how we might live in this faith, holiness and obedience. And specifically in terms of the reading we from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians today.

In verses 9 and 10 we hear this:-

<sup>9</sup> 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 <sup>10</sup> and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more,

Paul knows that they love each other, and yet he's urging them all the more to continue in this. His emphasis on this is very strong, and it reminds me very much of the reading from 1 Corinthians 13 that we also usually hear at weddings. Paul begins this piece of scripture by saying:-

“And now I will show you the most excellent way”,  
And he ends it like this :-  
“Now these three remain: faith, hope and love.  
But the greatest of these is love.”

The next bit of Thessalonians I'd like to look at is verses 11 and 12:-

<sup>11</sup> to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, <sup>12</sup> so that you may behave properly towards outsiders and be dependent on no one.

This I suppose is about getting on with others, and making our lives an example. So that others might be drawn to also come to know Jesus. It challenges us to think - How different are we compared to our friends and those we know who aren't Christians?

Now, whilst we're talking about love and getting on, I'd just like to share with you a story about the ecumenical ministers group I was a part of in Ayr, before we came to live here. When a new Presbyterian minister arrived, I was initially a bit weary of him, because I knew we had different beliefs on certain things. Sometimes we would have theological discussions, and you know what? We didn't always agree 100% on everything. We did however, still love each other as Christian brothers. And we worked well together, on a number of projects to share the gospel in the community. And last Christmas when he was holidaying on the Gold Coast we shared a meal together. Despite our differences, what we have in common is much stronger in uniting us, as we attempt to live out our lives as followers of Jesus.

As Christians we need to continually seek to work together, to show God's love to the world.

## Conclusion

So in conclusion, what have we looked at from our scripture readings today. We know that the second coming of Jesus will be a reality. We don't know when, but we do know it will happen. As Christians we are called to live in anticipation of this. We are called to live out our lives following Jesus. And there is so much that this might entail, both privately and as part of this faith community. In prayer, in action, in work or mission we are called to live out our lives in the hope we have in what Jesus has done for us, in his life, in his death and in his resurrection, we anticipate his return. But in all that we do in anticipation of his second coming, we need to do with the intention of love. Because if what we do is without love, then it is nothing.  
Amen.