



Worshipping & Praying Together as a community dispersed

during the week beginning
Sunday, 8th November 2020

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

The Parish of Christ Church Cathedral, Newcastle.

The worshipping communities of the Cathedral and St Peter's Hamilton.

2020 will go down in history as one of the most extraordinary years ever! Sadly, much of what has challenged life as we knew it is not miraculously going to change just because the calendar changes from December 2020 to January 2021, even though wish and hope that it would... 2020 has been extraordinary and while we are celebrating "donut days" (days without COVID transmissions) around our beautiful island home, our brothers and sisters in the northern hemisphere and in many parts of the global south are facing second and third waves of the pandemic, back in isolation and lockdown, burying and cremating their dead, and crying out to God for mercy! We join them in this prayer.

This week's gospel grounds us in our tracks also, as we reflect on 5 wise bridesmaids with plenty of oil for their lamps to see the night through, and 5 not so wise bridesmaids with no reserves left when the bridegroom finally comes to call them to the wedding banquet. The allegory of the oil for the lamps illuminates a message for us all... during these times of wanting and waiting, what are we doing to keep our oil reserves plentiful while we wait for what is to come?

The season of Advent (only 3 weeks away!) is our reminder to prepare and be ready for the coming of God's incarnate son, who is coming to bring us, his church, the bride, and all his bridesmaids and wedding guests, to his heavenly wedding banquet. While we wait and prepare, Advent is a wonderful opportunity to immerse ourselves in reading and prayerful reflection about what the Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ really means for us.

What do you have planned for Advent for your own preparation? If you are interested to join a study group, you are welcome to join the Zoom Spirituality Group on Tuesdays at 4.00pm, or you may want to register for another time. You can do this by putting your name on the sign-on sheet at the back of the Cathedral this Sunday, or you can contact Reverend Angela by email at revangela.peverell@newcastlecathedral.org.au or by text on 0400 076 515. We will set another time for those who are interested based on popular preferences.

This year's Advent Study is ***Freedom is Coming, from Advent to Epiphany with the Prophet Isaiah*** by Bishop Nick Baines.

Families@Five will be on Saturday, 5th December 2020 at 5.00pm at the Cathedral.

Eucharists are offered at Christ Church Cathedral on Sundays at 8.00am and 10.30am, and Monday to Friday at 8.30am (following Morning Prayer).

Eucharists are also offered at St Peter's Hamilton at 11.00am on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Morning and Evening Prayer and Holy Communion (Wednesdays and Sundays) are streamed each day:

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXyas2uhJUNOnDetOpPdUOg>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/christchurchcathedralnewcastle/>

The Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

Joshua 24: 1-3a, 14-25

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. 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. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. “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. 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.” Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; 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; 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.” 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. 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.” And the people said to Joshua, “No, we will serve the Lord!” 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.” He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.” The people said to Joshua, “The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey.” So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

Psalms 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 forbears 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

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; and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more, to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one. 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. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. 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. 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. 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 forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Matthew 25: 1-13

Jesus told this parable to his disciples: "Then the kingdom of heaven will belike this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 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.' 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. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Reflection on a page by The Very Reverend Katherine Bowyer - Pentecost XXIII

I've written before about how, during the time in which we were not able to physically gather for worship, one of the things that was very important to me, was ensuring that the Sanctuary lamps in the Cathedral remained alight. As we closed the Cathedral doors back in March, I asked Margaret Fauchon, one of our verging team who care for our lamps, to instruct me in the mysteries of keeping the lamps.

It's a straightforward enough process, but it is one which cannot be rushed. The wicks must be trimmed – but not too much. The lamps must be cleaned to ensure the wick burns well and operates smoothly. There is a definite art in filling the lamps – otherwise kerosene goes everywhere, taking a long time to clean up (speaking from personal experience on more than one occasion). Finally there is a skill in determining how high the flame burns: it must be high enough so that it can be seen, but not so high that it burns through the kerosene too quickly.

As the weeks turned into months when we could not gather, it became increasingly important to me to keep the lamps alight. They were amongst the first things I would check on entering the Cathedral, and the last things I would check on leaving. On Sunday mornings, when I would spend several hours in prayer and meditation in the Cathedral, tending the lamps was the final thing I would do before I left. Having prayed for and with our community, I would ensure that the lamps were burning brightly for another week, ready and waiting for when we would return.

You might wonder why it was so important for me to tend these lamps which potentially only I would see. Wouldn't it have been better stewardship to leave them unlit until the doors were opened once more? Yet it became a powerful symbol for me, that the Holy Spirit had not left us, and that when we returned, at a time which was then unknown, we would be found ready and waiting. The longer we waited to return, the more important it became for me, and I did, at times, feel like one of the bridesmaids, keeping the lamp burning.

What did it matter that no one else could see it? I knew that it was alight, that we were ready, that we had not lost hope, and that God's Spirit was with us. In the end, that was all that mattered.

In the parable in the Gospel, we have ten bridesmaids who are waiting for the bridegroom to arrive. Their role is to start the celebrations, to go out and greet the bridegroom when he arrives, and so they wait, with torches or lamps ready, with anticipation, and belief that the bridegroom will come.

These were lights to lighten the darkness.

And so, when the bridegroom arrives, five of the bridesmaids are found lacking in oil. They can bring no light to the darkness. Brendan Byrne suggests that the oil is analogous to the works of faith.¹ All of the bridesmaids had faith that the bridegroom would come. But only some had followed up this faith with works, works which brought light to the darkness.

Byrne writes: "The wise may 'sleep' (in death) before the coming of the Lord, but when he does come they will go out to meet him, their 'torches' brightly ablaze...because of the 'oil' (good works) they have in sufficient measure."² It's the same sort of thing that the writer of the First Letter to the Thessalonians talks about when they write concerning those who have died. These are ones who have had faith and works, who are people of light, but we, with them, will be caught up together in one kingdom when the Lord comes. In this time just after All Saints and All Souls, and with all the world holds for us at this time, it's an important reminder for us to hear. So this week, keep your lamp burning. For the world needs light. Light in the darkness.

¹ Brendan Byrne, *Lifting the Burden: Reading Matthew's Gospel in the Church Today*, St Pauls Publications, Strathfield, NSW, Australia, 2004, p.188

² Byrne, *op.cit.*, pp.188-9.

Readings for next week – The Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Judges 4: 1-10

Psalm 123

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11

Matthew 25: 14-30



Prayers for use during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ever present God,
be with us in our isolation,
be close to us in our distancing,
be healing in our sickness,
be joy in our sadness,
be light in our darkness,
be wisdom in our confusion,
be all that is familiar when all is
unfamiliar,
that when the doors reopen
we may with the zeal of Pentecost
inhabit our communities
and speak of your goodness
to an emerging world.
For Jesus' sake. **Amen.**

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and
distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and
fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us
from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

Please do not hesitate to contact Dean Katherine or Reverend Angela if you have any concerns at this time and if you would like for us to visit you at home.

Parish office: (02) 4929 2052 or cathedral@newcastlecathedral.org.au

Dean Katherine: 0407 201 693 or katherinebowyer@newcastleanglican.org.au

Reverend Angela: 0400 076 515 or revangela.peverell@newcastlecathedral.org.au