



Matthew 25:1–13

25 “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4 The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. 6 “At midnight the cry rang

out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' 7 "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 9 "'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' 10 "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. 11 "Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!' 12 "But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.' 13 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Reflection

Take a close look at today's artwork. It is an original piece drawn by a young artist, Josh Butler, who attends our 6pm congregation at Church Hill. If you look closely you'll see that the swirls in the background are him painstakingly and so beautifully inscribing the words of this passage over and over again, weaving them into the very fabric of his art – because these words touched Josh very deeply and God has written them on his heart. I asked Josh what so moved him about this passage and he kept returning to a single word, 'expectancy'.

Expectancy. The expectancy of these young bridesmaids waiting for the arrival

of the bridegroom at the marriage of their dear friend or sister. It's the most important day of her life, the most important moment of her life. And they too have fantasized over a day like this since they were little girls, much like many brides do today, and as young women almost universally did in the ancient world. And so with great expectancy, anticipation and joy they are waiting to play their part in the coming of the bridegroom.

The scene is a typical one from first century Palestine where wedding celebrations could last several days. A whole town or village might turn out to celebrate various ceremonies, customs and feasts associated with marriage. Our passage describes a welcoming processional escorting the bridegroom through the streets to his

home where the wedding feast is prepared. It appears that his bride has gone ahead and awaits his arrival. Her bridesmaids are charged with lighting his way, serenading and celebrating his entrance to the wedding feast. Torches light the way in the darkness, so all the bridesmaids have to take enough oil to keep them burning for as long as necessary. But the bridegroom is delayed well into the night, and the bridesmaids have fallen asleep, only to be awakened suddenly by the cry,

‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

Those who are prepared hold up their torches excitedly, bathing the bridegroom in light, and they are welcomed warmly by him into the wedding feast. But in a sharp

and unexpected turn, those who are unprepared are refused entry. We'll come to this in a moment, but for now let's rest in this joyous moment; the expectation, anticipation and preparation for this happy day.

As is always the case with the teaching of Jesus this beautiful human moment also has a theological richness. Jesus' parable is filled with Old Testament heritage. In the book of Proverbs, Wisdom and Folly are personified as two women. In this story Lady Wisdom and Mistress Folly have each become five young girls who live up to their names by the preparations they make, or fail to make, in their role in heralding the arrival of the bridegroom. He's delayed, waylaid; five are ready, five are not. Wisdom, Folly and a bridegroom, which is

also an image that is filled with Old Testament overtones. Often in the prophets the Messiah is pictured as a bridegroom, other times God himself is portrayed as the 'husband' of his people. In Jesus, the two coalesce. And in the New Testament some of the most poignant imagery surrounding the Church is that of a bride, Jesus as her groom, and his Second Coming being one of marriage celebrations and feasting.

Jesus' illustration may be beautiful and memorable but today's lesson is not new. Over the past few days Jesus has likened his Second Coming to the flood in Noah's day, to a thief who comes at night, to a master who comes home unexpectedly to his household that he's left in charge of his servants, and today, to a bridegroom

whose arrival is delayed. And in his next two extended parables that fill out the remainder of Matthew 25 Jesus' message will again be the same. Five consecutive parables each making the same essential point. Jesus could not make his point more strongly or emphatically. Be ready. I will return suddenly. Will you be prepared?

Think & Pray

Take some time now to reflect personally over the strong imagery of this passage. Such expectancy. Such a joyous occasion. Lamp's held high offering light to our world, shining light on the person and work of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Celebrating and serenading Jesus. Waiting expectantly, patiently and faithfully for his return. Going about the tasks that he has

set us that are so important in the lead-up to the wedding feast of the Lamb. Do you share this expectancy? Does the prospect of Jesus' return light up your face with joy? Move you to celebrate it in your art? Are you holding up your own lamp, in service of him and as a light to our world?

Or are you a Christian making no preparations whatsoever whom Jesus teaches us in this passage is in fact no Christian at all. If you're listening to this app and are feeling convicted by Jesus' words, then I'm confident that the Holy Spirit is at work in your heart. So why not prepare yourself right now for the Second Coming of Jesus by giving your life over to him? Speak to him now in prayer. Own up to your sins and ask him for his forgiveness. Tell him that you trust him, that you want a living rela-

tionship with him, and that you believe that in his death and resurrection he died for your sins and has wiped your slate clean with God. Ask him that you might be filled by his Holy Spirit and that the remainder of your life might be filled with expectant joy as you prepare yourself and the people God's put in your life for Jesus' return. Why not do it now and experience the joy and excitement of being a Christian?

And for those amongst us who already live in this joy pray today that God might refresh our hearts anew in anticipation of what is in store for us at Jesus' return. Pray that we might look forward with eager expectation to the wedding feast that awaits us, to the great celebration, and the climactic end of the ages when God will set everything right again. The day when ev-

everything will be made new and the dead raised imperishable. The day when we will live in peace, happiness and praise of our God into all eternity, living life to its fullest extent in a world recreated as it was always meant to be. Might this vision be the guiding vision and the legacy of our lives as we live them in preparation of Jesus' return.