



Sunday Reflection

23rd Sunday after Pentecost

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 8 November 2020

Pentecost 23

Remembrance Sunday

Today we remember that preparation is important in all areas of life. Today we reflect on what it means to make spiritual preparations.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." *Matthew 25.13*

An Illustration to set the scene

The budget for UK defence in the year to March 2020 was £50.3 billion. The US spends \$649 billion (£499 billion). This large amount of money is spent on everything that is necessary to prepare in case the military is required to provide protection for the country, either at home or abroad. The preparations take many forms – the cost of personnel, development of new equipment and the cost of that equipment, training, housing and more. If any group of people demonstrates the ability to make solid preparations, it is surely the military.

But preparation for deployment is about more than practical considerations. Emotional and spiritual preparations are also important, and each service includes within its ranks chaplains, who provide the kind of support that serving personnel and their families need. They are there to provide support to military personnel, whether they are training at home, or deployed abroad, training or facing real conflict.

The needs of military personnel themselves are different from those of their families, but all live with the possibility that tomorrow, next week, next month, or next year the call may come to be deployed somewhere dangerous. While it isn't possible to be truly prepared for such a call, chaplains and others can help people to prepare as much as possible, both spiritually and emotionally.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Today's parable is a story of the prepared and the unprepared. The necessary preparations for the wedding involve thinking things through to the end and considering all the possibilities. It isn't that the foolish bridesmaids have no oil at all. They have oil in their lamps and presumably think it will be enough to last until the bridegroom arrives. But he is delayed. They hadn't considered that possibility. The result is that they are, literally, left in the dark. By the time they have sorted out the necessary oil, everything, and everyone, has moved on, and they are left behind. The celebration they are supposed to be attending goes on without them. They have the oil they need, but at the wrong time.

On the other hand, the wise bridesmaids have thought it all through. They've considered every possibility. They realise that

things might not happen as they expect and they are prepared. They join the party as planned.

The general interpretation of this parable is that it is a warning to stay prepared and focused in anticipation of the Lord's return. By the time that Matthew's Gospel was written, it was clear that Jesus' promise to return was not to be fulfilled immediately.

Today's reading from 1 Thessalonians is Paul's reassurance that those who have died during this delay will not miss out on the kingdom of God at the end times.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

Unlike military preparations, there is very little we can do in a practical sense to be ready for Christ's return. But, like military personnel and their families, we can make mental and spiritual preparations for the promised end and for whatever it is that God has planned for us on our journey through life.

Perhaps, like the foolish bridesmaids, we attend to our spiritual life to some extent. We could think of the oil in their lamps as prayer, meditation on God's word and other spiritual practices. We may be developing an excellent relationship with God by these methods, but at some point we become distracted and lose focus. The oil has run out and we put off going to buy some more. It's very easy to do, and it may be just at the wrong moment, when we are on the verge of moving on to something deeper, or when something happens that requires a depth of spiritual maturity to cope, or to make the most of an opportunity.

Like the bridesmaids, and the military personnel and their families, we do not know the day or the hour. We can only remain prepared, and those preparations are both a challenge

and a joy, as God leads us to new heights of understanding and relationship.

“Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” *Matthew 25.13*

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God’s spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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