



St Stephens Williamstown Uniting Church in Australia  
Service of the Word for the Gathered at Home  
Proper 27 (32) Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

*Naidoc Week 8-15<sup>th</sup> November / Remembrance Day 11<sup>th</sup> November*

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2020 - Prepared by Rev. S. Juliette Maua'i

*Place a cross and Bible (for Reading) on a table with a Green cloth - today's Liturgical Colour. Open internet: copy then paste link OR click on link.*

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25; Psalm 78:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13



*God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble. Psalm 46.1*

## We Gather as the People of God

### Call to Worship

We meet in the presence of God who calls us to share in Christ's ministry of reconciliation.

We commit in prayer for God's kingdom to come, working together with all people of good-will toward justice and peace between nations and peoples; the hope of our calling.

We pray for all who in bereavement, disability and pain, continue to suffer the consequences of fighting and terror.

We remember with thanksgiving and sorrow those whose lives, in world wars and conflicts past and present, have been given and taken away. **Amen.**

*Please remain standing as you are able*

**Song: TIS 10 The Lord's my Shepherd...** <https://youtu.be/1IHGIncpdV4>

*Please be seated*

### Acknowledgement to Country:

*This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here. We acknowledge the Yalukit-willam people of the Kulin Nation, traditional custodians of this land under God. We commit ourselves again to working for reconciliation in this land.*

*We pay our respects to their Elders – past, present, and emerging.*

I also acknowledge those whose forefathers came from distant lands and whose generations call this Land, home.

### Prayer of Confession and Lament:

O Christ,

in pain and agony on the cross you bore the brunt of the world's violence

you wore our insults scorched upon your back and in your haunting cry of desolation

you utter our grief, our anguish, our loss.

Hear the cry of your people.

O God still the turmoil within us and in this world.

***Let your mercy and peace lead us in hope.***

We hold before you: all the violence done in your name.

Those maimed by war or scared by hatred.

Those traumatised by nightmares which years of peace cannot erase.

Those crippled in spirit as well as in body those who cannot or will not forgive.

***Response***

We hold before you: the tyrants of our age who wreak havoc with the minds and bodies of the young and force them to commit horrendous crimes.

We hold before you: a world broken by despair where false prophets voice not words of peace but chant a mantra of revenge

***Response***

We hold before you: our own complicity in thinking we know what is best for our Indigenous First Nations Peoples but all we did was take away the children of our Indigenous Mothers and Fathers

many still not reunited with their parents and families

***Response***

Hear what comfortable words our saviour Christ says to all who truly turn to God:

'Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.'

We wholeheartedly repent of the evil we have done, and the evil done on our behalf.

And we look for grace to offer forgiveness and to know ourselves forgiven.

### Declaration of Forgiveness

God was in Christ reconciling the world; by his wounds we have been healed.

Hear and live Christ's word of grace: "Your sins are forgiven." **Thanks be to God!**

**The Peace:** The Peace of the Lord be with you! **And also with you.**

**Song: TIS 668 Touch the earth lightly...** <https://youtu.be/-js8Ko2qU1I>

*Please be seated*

### **We Listen for God's Word**

**Matthew 25:1-13** - The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

**Lord, may we meditate on these words of scripture and come to a deeper understanding of their meaning for our time.**

**Reflection:** *"Don't rush, take stock, and be ready for Christ's coming" - Rev. S. Juliette Maua'i*

Just prior to today's Gospel reading, Jesus spoke about a master's surprise return that catches his disloyal servant on the back foot; a servant who thinks he has ample time to violate, to crush his fellow servants, as well as overindulge. This week the parable about ten bridesmaids follows the harsh warning about the fate of that unfaithful, ill-prepared and astonished servant.

Some commentaries on this text provide some background on marriage customs in the first century. Although we can not be sure about details, some scholars believe that getting married took both time and effort and that there were two stages in the process of getting married. First, the agreement between the bride and the groom's families. Second, it was the retrieving of the bride for the wedding ceremony by the groom. Then this is followed by a celebration that went on for days.

Such long celebrations were likely to be an opportune time for unmarried women and men to connect and perhaps keep an eye out for future husbands and wives, and to link up. I suppose the bridesmaids had a chance to be noticed favourably whilst attending to the bride. When we think about Jesus' teachings on being generous, this would seem at odds with five of the bridesmaids refusing to share what they have.

That said, the story isn't about generosity or sharing but it is about being, "*prepared*". This would describe the discernment of the young women who brought enough oil. Hence, five of the young women had enough sense, as Thomas Long describes as not to be "ready for the groom but...for the groom's delay."

If the ten bridesmaids, both the foolish ones and the wise ones, represent the church today, then how ready are we as Jesus' followers, for our Saviour's return? And what does it mean to be, ready? In this case, what does it mean in having enough oil look like today let alone almost two thousand years after Jesus died and rose again. For Jesus is promising to return one day but Jesus is not saying when?!

Thomas Long writes, "the wise ones in the church...hold on to the faith deep into the night" and even though they do not see no bridegroom coming they "still hope and serve and pray and wait for the promised victory of God" (*Matthew, Westminster Bible Companion*). These are familiar words to Christians and believers that deserve we give heed to pause. Jesus' story ends with the foolish young women being locked out of the party.

Jesus' familiar words to the readers of Matthew's Gospel resonate if you remember as Jesus finished his stirring Sermon on the Mount, he had some pointed words to say about people who say they are religious, but fail to live out their faith and not fulfilled God's will. Jesus said he would claim to not knowing those people who cry "Lord, Lord," (Matthew 7:23).

These are stark words for us today and although some may not like to dwell on Jesus' harsh apocalyptic words, I think we should not shy away from Jesus' warning to humanity, focusing too on the religious rhetoric and looking to the end times. It is our reality. Jesus is teaching us what we ought to do and to put into context, Matthew's community were still looking to the skies for Jesus who ascended into heaven a generation before, and the Christians in Matthew's community were setting their sights and their hopes on Jesus' return in their time.

However, by the time Matthew wrote his Gospel, there had already been a delay. Perhaps that delay triggered some Matthean Christians to question and lose their way. Matthew's account, including these challenging parables, certainly addresses those who would lose faith and fall away.

Here we are some two thousand years later, and our questions may be just as crucial now as they were then – What does "ready" look like for people of faith? What is God going to do about the mess that we are in (though it is the mess humanity has done, not God)? And some would ask, when will our enemies get what they deserve?

Do we hear ourselves! Look around us! I am not sure we can question those who came before us; we need only look at what we are doing to Mother Earth, and she is responding in the most natural way to preserve Creation.

Perhaps if we welcome Jesus' confronting warning as discipline for learning and growth, and Jesus, as our salvation, then our discipline to often pause and take stock, rather than rushing ahead to what the world is doing, then we might see the need as

Christians to hear Jesus' harsh words as 'tough love'. We need to hear about grace, we certainly need to hear regularly about justice! Arland J. Hultgren, a Lutheran theologian (*Parables of Jesus: a Commentary*), describes it as "both threat and promise, law and gospel" (*The Lectionary Commentary: The Gospels*).

So, in our waiting for Jesus' return and all that Jesus has said to us, *how are we to live in the meantime?* How can we be prepared like the five "wise" bridesmaids? I leave this question for each of us to ponder, and for you to respond in the way you will live out how you choose to respond to these questions for our time, and let your life speak to you in the choice you choose. May the words of Jesus, speaking firmly and in truth, guide all who confess Jesus, as Lord and Saviour, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one with Creator God. **Amen.**

**Song: TIS 586 Abide with me...** <https://youtu.be/16vi5Zey1mk>

### **Intercessory Prayers:**

Friends in Jesus Christ,

Let us pray for all who suffer as a result of conflict, and ask that God may give us peace:

for the servicemen and women who have died in the violence of war, each one remembered by and known to God.

May God give peace. **God give peace.**

for those who love them in death as in life, offering the distress of our grief and the sadness of our loss;  
for all members of the armed forces who face danger, remembering family, friends and all who pray for their safe return;  
for civilian women, children and men whose lives are disfigured by war or terror,  
calling to mind in penitence the anger and hatreds of humanity;  
May God give peace. **God give peace.**

for peace-makers and peace-keepers, who seek to keep this world secure and free;  
for all Defence Force chaplains offering support, encouragement, acceptance, compassion and understanding  
wherever and whenever it is needed;  
for all who bear the burden and privilege of leadership, political, military, and religious; asking for gifts of wisdom and  
resolve in the search for reconciliation and peace.  
May God give peace. **God give peace.**

O God of truth and justice,  
we hold before you those whose memory we cherish, and those whose names we will never know.  
Help us to lift our eyes above the torment of this broken world and grant us the grace to pray for those who wish us harm.  
As we honour the past, may we put our faith in your future; for you are the source of life and hope,  
now and for ever. **Amen.**

**THE LORD'S PRAYER...** (*prayerfully pray the Lord's Prayer in the language/version of your choice*)

**Our Father in heaven,**

**Hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, On earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, As we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial And deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**



**Offertory Call** – Readiness for Mission is one way to interpret the diligence of the Wise Wedding Attendants. Their lamps are filled and available to be sparked into light at the moment the Beloved appears to begin the wedding feast of justice, love and peace.

Let us be ready, too, with our tithes and offerings, to support the work of our congregation and the wider church.

**Offertory Prayer** - *Offering brought forward*

O God, we have come and given generously of our gifts.

Take, bless and multiply them so that they may be a blessing in your world.

In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

### **We Are Sent Forth into the World**

**Song: TIS 607 Make me a channel of your peace...** <https://youtu.be/a0hp60WW6lQ>

### **Blessing/Dismissal**

Friends in Christ keep your lamps filled and your hearts open, ready for the call of God.

Go in peace, counting on the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,

and the blessed communion of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

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*Confucius, 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.*

*"Heaven means to be one with God."*