

Our Gospel message this morning is a parable about being prepared and patience and the end time. It is also somewhat judgemental.

The parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids is unique in our scripture. It is only found in Matthew. I would like you to consider if you think that the message in this parable sounds like Jesus? Or could it possibly be the evangelist? Is this an attempt by Jesus to frighten his listeners? Or could it be written by someone who peppers his gospel with judgement and the weeping and gnashing of teeth?

Does this parable sound like Jesus? Like the man who ate with tax collectors, sinners and prostitutes? Does this sound like the man who preached that the kingdom was for everyone? Does this sound like the man who healed and fed and taught? Does this sound like the man who talked about God's love for all? Would this man shut the door on those that came late? I think our parable this morning sounds much more like the evangelist - the person we call Matthew.

Our parable is about preparation and waiting and being ready.

What does it mean to be prepared? We can easily come up with some answers, it means putting on your snow tires before January. It could mean cleaning out eavestroughs before they become clogged and result in damage. It could mean stocking up your first aid kit - before you are scrambling

to find bandages. It could also mean having that 24 hour preparedness kit ready before a disaster.

Being prepared can mean different things to different people. Some of us are more prepared than others.

The bridesmaids were not unprepared. They all came with lamps that had oil in them. They were ready for the bridegroom. But he was late. He was delayed and they all fell asleep. And because of the delay half of the bridesmaids ran out of oil. I am not sure that this makes them foolish or perhaps only rather less prepared than their friends.

Maybe how you hear this story depends on where you place yourself in it. Are you one of the well stocked - well prepared bridesmaids enjoying the party or one of the ones who brought just enough but has no contingency plan?

Some of us are more prepared than others!

The only difference between the two groups of bridesmaids is that one group was prepared for the wait. And that is really what the story is about.

The wait. The wait for Christ's return. Matthew's audience, Matthew's community was growing tired of waiting. They may have been starting to have some niggling doubts. Was Jesus going to return as he said that he would?

And what about all of the generations since? We find ourselves still waiting. If the end of the age comes with our own deaths or Jesus' return - the message from this parable is the same. Be prepared and be patient.

Being patient is difficult for us. We do not like to wait. We are used to a fast paced society. Our text this morning asks us to wait. To be prepared to wait. The bridegroom's delay does not mean that he is not coming. And the party does not start until he arrives!

The parable of the wise and the foolish bridesmaids asks us to live in hope for what has been promised - but is not here yet. Knowledge, faith and love are tools for living in the time before eternity - they are not tools to gain entrance.

So how can we prepare? We remain in community with others who wait. We study and we pray and we do deeds of mercy, we offer forgiveness and we spread justice and peace. And we share the love of God. We let others know that they are beloved children of God. And we wait. This is how we prepare.

Often we believe that we will have time enough for everything. We will have time to mend relationships, time to visit a loved one later on, time to learn a skill, time to offer words of

encouragement or gratitude and thanksgiving or replacing a bad habit or a good one.

The truth is that sometimes we run out of time for these things. Sometimes we do not do the things we needed to do in time. Sometimes there will be endings before we are ready for them.

And so as our text cautions us - be prepared. No one knows when the endings will happen. Be prepared. Wait with patience. The parable of the bridesmaids shows us that the wise have prepared for an unknown, but secure future and the foolish have assumed a bright future but have done little to prepare for it.

And so we wait. We wait together as a worshipping community . We wait. And as we wait we prepare. We love our neighbour as ourselves, we love God with all our hearts and minds and strength. We live in a time and a place with a promise. A time of what will be but is not yet.

AMEN