

# Life Eternal: Watch and Be Ready

Rev'd Susan F. Straub

## Introduction

The readings from Joshua and I Thessalonians today, hold God's promise of life: plenty of life, inexhaustible life, eternal life. Abram was an old man, as good as dead, and God called him and promised to make through him a great nation. Jesus died and God raised him and made through him a great people of faith. Is that the end? I don't think so, life isn't static is it, it flows on. Same with God's promises.

What do we need to have in order for God to continue to fulfill this promise? The lamp of Faith and the good oil so that the light which signals that God's love is here, right where we happen to be, doesn't go out in times of darkness. Faith is simply believing in God, the work of Jesus on the cross, and his promise of eternal life. To make it personal, this means ME! That's grasping the vision. As we step out to begin the life, we use the good oil of whatever goods we have, and crucially, keep walking and giving to the end of our days.

With new cases of CoVID-19 being found only among those arriving from overseas, it's no wonder health and government officials are warning us of complacency. It's so easy to let our guard down when we're thinking: Well, it hasn't happened yet, could be a while; or even, it might never happen!

## **Matthew 25:1-13 – The wise prepared and the foolish unprepared**

The passage from the gospel according to Matthew this morning is about being prepared: prepared for Christ's coming to us, the end of our time on this earth, and our celebration with Christ. It's about keeping in mind the vision so that the

mission is fulfilled through wise stewardship: able to meet those things which are not necessarily hoped for, but which are possible. Just as Matthew was writing for his church, who hoped for and expected Christ's imminent return.

Verse 3, at the beginning of Chapter 24, we read: 'When he (Jesus) was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will this be and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus didn't give them a date: nothing so certain. He did give a list of disasters: wars, conflict, famines and earthquakes. Unfortunately, disasters happen in every age. At no time in history perhaps are we more aware of disasters around the globe. Our own age is one of almost instant transmission of information. Jesus also warned his disciples of disasters in their relationships with others: hatred, betrayal, being led astray by those whose word they trusted. Again, unfortunately, things that happen at some time in the lives of all of us to varying degrees.

It's important for us to understand that Jesus was speaking of these things not to the crowds, not to the Pharisees, but to his disciples, those close to him. One who learns a way of being and relating to the world from Jesus, is not guaranteed personal peace, prosperity, health or life being fair: the traditional blessings of the righteous. Again, Jesus turns things around. Rather than good deeds and a righteous life bringing blessings to the individual, being a disciple of Christ is do the work of bringing blessings to those who don't have them: his peace to those who don't have it; prosperity to those who don't have it; health to those who don't have it; justice to those who don't have it. Living the life of Christ, is to live the life of the Spirit: working to bring God's promise of life to fulfillment. It is to live the life of giving life, and meaning in life, to others. It is to be wise in our stewardship of our resources.

The oil that keeps the lamps burning to light the way for Christ to come, is not only the spiritual oil of faith and vision, and other spiritual gifts, but also the material 'good oil'. For many the light that allows them to see Christ – precedes his coming into their lives – is thrown by the oil of goods: of buildings and land such as cathedrals, churches, rectories, gardens; of great works of art and literature; newsletters and computers; bread, cakes, wine and money. All these are provision for our purpose: lighting the way of Christ.

Those who seek to bring Christ's peace, prosperity, health, and justice get in the face (or up the nose) of those who have something to gain from their own way of thinking, and living. And sometimes we meet resounding indifference. At some time, too, we might be in need of peace, prosperity, health, and justice. Disciples of Christ understand that we, as humanity, all share this common life. Our Lord is God who came among us and shared the life we have in common (disasters unprecedented? Or '...there is nothing new under the sun' ?).

Be that as it may, it's important for us to recall that Jesus then went on to teach his disciples that whatever the circumstances, they must be constantly prepared to receive him, and to do what was necessary for him when he came. They were to give an account of themselves; not only ready but ABLE; not only with the lamp of faith, but with the 'good oil', the provision, to light the way of Christ as he came again. Those in the darkness of despair and hopelessness, may see, find faith in their lives, and stay for the celebration.

Whether he came earlier or later than the disciples expected, once he came, it would be too late to make up deficiencies: "When was it that we saw you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of you?". Such deficiencies Jesus told his disciples would exclude them from the celebration: will exclude us.

The parable tells us that those who think it unnecessary to make provision for a lengthy period of waiting for Christ's return to judge the living and the dead are foolish. They are rightly excluded from the joy of the feast.

Henri Nouwen wrote: 'celebrating means the affirmation of the present, which becomes fully possible only by remembering the past and expecting more to come in the future. But celebrating in this sense very seldom takes place. More often than not the present is denied, the past becomes a source of complaints, and the future is looked upon as a reason for despair or apathy. Nothing is as difficult as really accepting one's own life.' (Creative Ministry, p. 100).

This is not only true of individuals, but even of the church itself. So, as disciples of Christ, we are to see the future as a land of opportunity for the fulfillment of God's promise of, not just existence, but never-ending life: eternal life – and joy in it!