

Devotion for the week leading to the 8th of November 2020

This service is written for Stretton Park and McDonald Wing in Maffra, Laurina Lodge in Heyfield and Royal Freemason's in Sale, but with the intention of also being available for private use.

INTRODUCTION from Joshua 24:1-3 & 14-25

Today's Old Testament reading tells of when Joshua assembled the Hebrew leaders and people when they were settling in the Promised Land of Israel. He mentioned the idols of the old lands they had left behind and asked them to choose who they would serve, the old idols or the one True God. Joshua said "as for myself and my household, we will serve the Lord."

HYMN No. 9 - Praise my soul the king of heaven

You can read the words to yourself, or out loud. If you remember the tune well enough you can sing it yourself. You can, of course sing just the first, or the first and last verses.

PRAYER

We thank you, O Lord for your care and protection over the years of our lives. Thank you too for this wonderful land where we are cared for, where there is peace and a concern for the welfare of all people. We pray that the welfare of all may become a reality through those who choose to work according to your purposes. Help us too, Lord, when we face choices, to always follow you and to do what you would have us do. Forgive us, we ask, for those times when we have chosen and acted wrongly. Take from us the regrets that haunt us from times past, and grant us your peace we pray, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

HYMN No. 18 - Trust and obey

BIBLE READING - Matthew, chapter 25, verse 1 to verse 13

REFLECTION

Today's reading is called the parable of the five foolish and five wise virgins. That is not really a helpful name these days. I would rather call it the parable of the ten bridesmaids. The five so-called foolish bridesmaids were not stupid, but they were unprepared. The other five bridesmaids were not especially wise they were just very well prepared. As for being virgins, their marital status was not important. They were doing the same sort of job that bridesmaids do these days, they were an important part of the wedding party.

Weddings in Jesus time and place were different to ours and the job of these bridesmaids was to wait until the bridegroom arrived and light the way for the bride. It was an evening wedding. In this wedding story in Israel, the bride waited for the groom to arrive instead of the way we do it here where the groom waits for the bride. So the bride was waiting, she waited and waited, the groom was very late arriving. We don't know why he was held up, the story does not tell us, maybe his horse broke down because it had been at the races the weekend before. He was hours late, he did not arrive until midnight and quite a few of the guests had fallen asleep by that time.

The bridesmaids woke up and got ready. Remember, it was their job to light the way. They had their oil-lamps, but it had been so long that some of them had run out of oil. The bridesmaids who still had enough oil for their lamps did not have any to spare. The wedding went ahead with the five well-prepared bridesmaids lighting the way while the others had to run off to try and find an open shop where they could buy some more oil.

This parable that Jesus told is all about being ready. It is one of those parables that reminds us that we don't know the day or the hour when we will meet God. Some of those parables seem to say that Jesus was expected to return soon. It does not really matter if He comes to earth to meet us, or if we finish our lives on earth and go to meet Him, the message remains the same. We should always be ready to meet God. Like the well-prepared bridesmaids we should always be doing our duty. They knew their duty, it was to light the way, not just to see the wedding or dance at the reception. Whatever it is that God wants you to do, that is the job that you should be doing. Be ready. Be prepared. Light the way.

HYMN No. 24 - Lead kindly light

As we remember the parable of the ten bridesmaids, we remember that there was a group working together. Today we remember those others who help to carry the light of the Gospel.

PRAYER

Thank you, O Lord for all of the people in all of the organisations that help to spread the good news of the Gospel around the world. We thank you too for those people you have sent to help us along our life's journey. Thank you for the way they helped to support and encourage us, and thank you for the times when we were able to help and support others. Thank you for all those who help us at this time in our lives, especially those who have worked particularly hard to keep us healthy and safe through this time of Covid. Thank you for those who work in all areas of food supply, those who keep things clean and those who work in entertainment and help to keep us occupied. We pray for our families and friends, that they might be safe, happy and well, wherever they are. And we pray together:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, For ever and ever, AMEN

HYMN No 7 - Count your blessings

The BLESSING

May the blessing of the almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
be upon you and remain with you always, Amen