***worship@home resources for 8 November***

Call to Worship (based on Ps 78:1-7)

We gather for worship to remember God’s glorious deeds and wisdom —

recorded by people whose lives were touched by divine grace.

**We are heirs of their faithfulness  
in witnessing to the greatness of God’s words and acts.**

May our witness be as resounding,   
**so that generations to come will continue to honour God’s name.**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Wurrundjeri people of the Kulin nation who have been the custodians of these lands and waters since time immemorial.   
We pay respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging, and commit ourselves afresh to walk with the First Peoples of this land in their search for justice.

HYMN TiS 158 God has spoken

God has spoken by the prophets,  
spoken the unchanging word,  
each from age to age proclaiming  
God, the one, the righteous Lord!  
In the world’s despair and turmoil  
one firm anchor holding fast:  
God eternal reigns forever,   
God the first and God the last.

God has spoken by Christ Jesus,  
Christ, the everlasting Son,  
brightness of the Father’s glory,  
with the Father ever one;  
spoken by the Word incarnate,  
God from God ere time began,  
Light from light, to earth descending,  
God revealed as Son of Man.

God is speaking by the Spirit,  
speaking to our hearts again,  
in the age-long word expounding  
God’s own message, now as then.  
Through the rise and fall of nations  
one sure faith yet standing fast;  
God still speaks, the word unchanging,  
God the first and God the last.

George Wallace Briggs 1875-1959 *alt*. Words © 1953 The Hymn Society. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

YouTube version here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoPiKqKTmbg>

prayer

Living God,  
Thank you for the many ways you bless our lives.

**Even as our city awakens from lockdown and we become busy again,  
we thank you for this quiet time to reflect and listen for a word from you.**

As our gardens thrive and young birds find their voice,  
**we thank you for the season of spring   
that reminds us of the new life you offer us every day.**

As we hear and read of all that is wrong in the world,  
**we thank you that you choose to work through us  
to bring your peace, hope and healing to those around us.**

Loving God,  
Forgive us when we have turned away from you,  
or from the needs of others. **Call us back to your ways  
and fill us with your love and wisdom,  
that they might guide our path. Amen.**

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Hear the good news: through Christ we are welcomed and renewed and loved.

**Thanks be to God**

BIBLE READINGS

Joshua 24:1, 14-18

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. …

“Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.”

Matthew 25:1-13 (The Message)

“God’s kingdom is like ten young virgins who took oil lamps and went out to greet the bridegroom. Five were silly and five were smart. The silly virgins took lamps, but no extra oil. The smart virgins took jars of oil to feed their lamps. The bridegroom didn’t show up when they expected him, and they all fell asleep.

In the middle of the night someone yelled out, ‘He’s here! The bridegroom’s here! Go out and greet him!’ The ten virgins got up and got their lamps ready. The silly virgins said to the smart ones, ‘Our lamps are going out; lend us some of your oil.’ They answered, ‘There might not be enough to go around; go buy your own.’ They did, but while they were out buying oil, the bridegroom arrived. When everyone who was there to greet him had gone into the wedding feast, the door was locked.

Much later, the other virgins, the silly ones, showed up and knocked on the door, saying, ‘Master, we’re here. Let us in.’ He answered, ‘Do I know you? I don’t think I know you.’ “

So stay alert. You have no idea when he might arrive.

REFLECTION

Today’s readings are about *choice* – how we will live and who we will serve. This year we’ve all had to make difficult choices – staying isolated at home when we would prefer to go and visit our friends, wearing a mask outside even though it feels awkward, waiting patiently for shops and other spaces to be opened up for use once again. We still need to wait longer to be allowed to gather in church buildings for face-to-face worship.

The Gospel reading from Matthew is one of several passages in this final section of teaching that focus on the absence and the promised return of Jesus and the choices we make as we wait. It was apparently a topic that Jesus spoke of on several occasions and a topic that both energized and concerned the emerging church community. After 2000 years of waiting we are far less concerned, but there are still important lessons for us to learn.

One lesson is that we do not know when Jesus will return, although the firm and consistent New Testament teaching is that Jesus will one day return. In some stories this happens unexpectedly soon, like a thief breaking into your house. In other stories, such as our reading today, Jesus (the bridegroom) is delayed and everyone falls asleep.

The second key lesson is how we are living and what choices are we making as we wait. The parable distinguishes between those who are smart and those who are silly. Although most English translations use the adjectives ‘wise’ and ‘foolish’ to describe the two types of people, the Greek is more colourful and the words are better translated as ‘sensible’ and ‘stupid’ (literally *moron* in Greek). What separates these types of people in the parable? Both groups have been invited to the wedding banquet. Both expect there may well be a wait and have brought lamps. The difference is that the sensible ones have brought further supplies of oil for their lamps. When the bridegroom finally turns up sometime in the middle of the night, all the bridesmaids light their lamps.

The lamps without the extra oil soon flicker out. This is where the parable gets interesting. Rather than sharing the oil supplies between them so that all have enough – a principle explicitly taught in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt 5:42) and illustrated in the feeding of the 5000 – those with the extra oil hold onto their supplies and suggest to the stupid bridesmaids to go buy more oil for themselves – at 2 in the morning! While they are gone searching, the bridegroom arrives with his entourage, people enter the feast and the doors are locked. The stupid bridesmaids later return – we’re not told whether they have found extra oil for their lamps – and are refused entry. The bridegroom states that he doesn’t know them, a chilling outcome that is also warned about in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:21-23).

So is the foolish choice not to bring extra oil (and what might this represent in our lives)?

Or is the foolish choice to go off on a wild goose chase searching for oil (and what might this represent in our lives)?

Or is the most foolish choice not to be personally known to the bridegroom who could let them into the feast?

If we read the whole of this Gospel, the sensible choice is to not just hear the message of Jesus but to choose to live it out in practical ways guided by mercy, compassion and justice. Then we will be like the person who enters God’s kingdom by living out God’s will (Matt 7:21) and the builder who built the house securely on the rock (Matt 7:24-25). We will also be like Joshua and his family in our OT reading who choose to serve God and not be distracted by other gods and other priorities.

The good news of this parable is that Jesus can and does show up at unexpected times. We may have fallen asleep as it were – but then God’s kingdom breaks in – perhaps through a friend or even a stranger – through an unexpected phone call or visit, or an offer of hospitality or a helping hand. We may even be the ones through whom God’s kingdom comes to others. Each time we work for justice or seek to be a peace-maker, we witness to our faith in Jesus. Each time we show compassion to someone or reach out to befriend someone, we shine a little of God’s kingdom into that person’s life or situation. Whether it’s offering encouragement when hope seems absent, or comfort when it’s needed or a glimmer of joy, we are living out God’s ways and shining a light to help others see their way to God.

HYMN TiS 599 Take my life

Take my life, and let it be  
consecrated, Lord, to thee.  
Take my moments and my days,  
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my voice, and let me sing  
always, only, for my King.  
Take my lips, and let them be  
filled with messages from thee.

Take my silver and my gold,  
nothing, Lord, would I withhold.  
Take my intellect, and use  
every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it thine;  
it shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart, it is thine own;  
it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
at thy feet its treasure-store.  
Take myself, and I will be  
ever, only, all for thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal 1836-79 *alt*.

YouTube version here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf11rReeWIs>

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Living God,  
Hear the prayers we bring for your world and your people today.  
We pray for the peoples of every nation:  
for those suffering from violence and persecution,  
those enduring the effects of Covid, famine and natural disasters,  
and for those who govern and administer the rule of law.

We give you thanks for all who work to bring an end to oppression, suffering and injustice.  
Loving God, we wait for your reign of peace.  
In your mercy, **hear our prayer**.

We pray for the church throughout the world,

For all who lead and serve in your name,  
for those whose faith has grown cold  
and for those who courageously share your message in word and action.

We pray for Christians working in places that are dangerous or resistant to your message.  
Loving God, we wait for your reign of hope.  
In your mercy, **hear our prayer**.

We pray for the communities in which we live here in Croydon and nearby suburbs,  
for those who have lost their jobs or are struggling to find enough work,  
for those serving on the front line of our hospitals, schools and aged care communities,  
and for those who are feeling anxious and worried about the future.

We give you thanks for the people who give their time and skills to care for the poor, the young and the elderly.  
Loving God, we wait for your reign of compassion.  
In your mercy, **hear our prayer**.

We pray also for those known to us who are sick or in distress,  
for those mourning the loss of loved ones,  
and for those longing to see their family and friends once again.  
We name them before you now in the silence of our hearts …

Loving God, we wait for your reign of healing.  
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**.

We pray now in the words Jesus taught us, saying: **Our Father in heaven…**

BENEDICTION

Go now, following in the footsteps  
of those who have gone before us in Christ.  
Worship the Lord.  
Serve God in sincerity and faithfulness.  
Teach those who come after you to trust in God.  
And may God protect you along the way;  
may Christ Jesus keep you alert and prepared;  
and may the Holy Spirit fuel the lamp that guides your path.  
**We go in peace to love and serve the Lord in the name of Christ.**

SENDING SONG Scatter us Lord Jesus Christ

Scatter us Lord Jesus Christ, you know where we’re going.  
Use our gifts so that we may share life overflowing.

Heal us, bless us now, our Lord, in your name we’re going.  
Be our comfort and our strength, share life overflowing.

Holy Spirit, go with us, in your joy we’re growing.  
Be our light, our love, our hope, be life overflowing.

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