KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH 08/11/26 OOS

GREETING
As Jesus speaks of lamps, oil, and waiting, we notice how faith is formed slowly, like oil gathered over time through small acts of trust, attention and love.

We may wonder what it means to be ready. Not ready in a rushed way, or an anxious way, but ready in a quiet way. A steady way.

Jesus tells a story about people waiting. Some have oil enough to keep their lamps burning. As we gather, we wonder what sustains us, what is being formed in us, and how God meets us in the waiting.

CALL TO WORSHIP
Come, you who are waiting.
We come, carrying hope and uncertainty.

Come, you who feel unprepared.
We come, just as we are.

Come, you who long for light.
We come, seeking what will sustain us.

Come, let us worship God who meets us in the waiting.

God of the long night,
you meet us in the waiting.
When we feel uncertain,
or unprepared,
or weary,
you do not turn us away.

Form in us a steady faith,
one that grows quietly,
one that endures.
Teach us to live in such a way
that we are ready,
not through fear,
but through trust.
Amen.

LIGHT THE CHRIST CANDLE God is here……God is with us

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FIRST PEOPLES

Today we gather on what has always been and always will be Eora country.

With great respect we acknowledge the Biddegal people
We honour elders, leaders and communities past, present and future.
May we walk gently and respectfully on this land.

SAYING WHO WE ARE

We are a community
Who welcome people of all cultures and lifestyles,
Who create a safe place for the community
And who share the journey of life and faith.

SING Tell out my soul TIS/161

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy name – the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercies sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

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PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of patience,
we confess that we often live distracted.
We rush.
We delay.

We assume there will always be more time.
We neglect the small things
that form our lives,
attention, kindness, prayer, presence.

God of Israel and God of Jesus Christ, we would not be here if you had not chosen to touch our lives with your love. We cannot hide our wonder that

you should choose to enter our world and our lives in person - in Jesus. Yet we confess that we sometimes have trouble in our decision-making when faced with questions of whether we wholeheartedly serve you or not. We are often tempted to put other than you first in our lives - when we are faced often daily, with choices which affect how we live as your faithful people - choices about how we share the gifts you have given us.
When the choices we make reflect not your glory but our own selfishness:

Forgive us

When the choices we make revolve around judging or condemning others without first listening to their stories:

Forgive us

When the choices we make contribute to our own prosperity and wellbeing while ignoring the needs of others:

Forgive us

When the choices we make diminish our awareness of you, O God, in the midst of those who suffer:

Forgive us

Gracious and loving God, strengthen us where we are weak with the renewing power of your Spirit so that the choices we make clearly reveal our identity as your faithful people, and as sincere and devoted followers of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord - in whose name we pray. Amen .

Words of Grace

Hear this:
God is not waiting to catch you unprepared.
God is already with you,
in the slow work of your becoming.
Even now,
grace is forming something within you.
You are held.
You are not too late.
Thanks be to God.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Before there was memory kept, you were there.
Before there was history kept, you were there.
You, Eternal God, creating, imagining
and tenderly bringing all things to life: you were there.
Beyond words for telling, you are there.
Beyond time and memory, you are there.
Magnificent and wise, you are there.
God of all creation and magnificence,
we relinquish all other gods to serve you, the only living God.
God of all creation and magnificence
we thank you for your covenant promises
which are true, unfailing, just and sound. Amen.

PSALM 78: 1-7

1Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

2I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old,

3things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us.

4We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.

5He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children;

6that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children,

7so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments;

PEACE

SING Comfort, Comfort all My People TIS/647

Comfort, comfort all my people
with the comfort of my Word.
Speak it tender to my people:
all your sins are taken away.

Though your tears be rivers running,
though your tears be an ocean full,
though you cry with the hurt of living:
comfort, comfort.

Every valley shall be lifted,
every mountain shall be low,
every rough place will be smoother:
comfort, comfort.

Comfort, comfort all my people
with the comfort of my Word.
Speak it tender to my people:
all your sins are taken away.

Though your eyes see only darkness,
though your eyes can see no light,

though your eyes see pain and sorrow:
comfort, comfort.

Every night will have its morning,
every pain will have an end,
every burden will be lightened:
comfort, comfort.

Comfort, comfort all my people
with the comfort of my Word.
Speak it tender to my people:
all your sins are taken away.

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HEBREW SCRIPTURES Joshua 24: 1-3a; 14-25

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. 2And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. 3Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac.

"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.

15Now 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." 16Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; 17for 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; 18and 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." 19But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. 20If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good." 21And the people said to Joshua, "No, we will serve the Lord!" 22Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." 23He said, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your

hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel." 24The people said to Joshua, "The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey." 25So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES Matthew 25: 1-13

25"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; 4but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. 6But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. 8The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' 10And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. 11Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' 12But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' 13Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

REFLECTION

Friends, welcome to Saltbush Uniting the Scattered Community and word around the bush. I'm Reverend Mark Faulkner and a very warm welcome to you all, wherever you are joining us from.

I've heard a few sermons based on our passage from the gospel of Matthew, and those sermons seem to focus on the trimming of oil lamps, the way of oil lamps, the making of oil lamps, the customs of marriage in the days of Jesus, and the process, the responsibility of being a bridesmaid. And those sermons seem to focus on the nitty gritty of this parable, but I'm not sure that this parable is really about that minute eye.

But Matthew, who is writing to a largely Jewish audience, wants to take this parable of Jesus and to make a point about being ready. Of course, the Jewish tradition had their long expectation of the coming of the Messiah, and there has been a big focus down throughout the centuries on the return of Jesus Christ. Even the madness of some groups predicting a time and a place for their event. I would suggest more so their event than God's event. And perhaps Matthew is reflecting on this expectation, the return of Christ. And perhaps Matthew is also looking back to the days of
Jesus, because Matthew of course wrote the gospel after the days of Jesus and using the parable as an illustration for God unfolding and revealing and doing new things.

In any time and age, humanity has not been good at thinking ahead and expecting what is unfolding. And this sits for people of any religion, but also for people just in life. People are very set in their ways and perhaps Matthew is simply saying to his Jewish listeners or any of his listeners or readers, see how hard it is for people to be ready and to perceive and to see what God is doing in Jesus and how ready and waiting and prepared are we as people.

Of course, this is a parable that also has a portion about judgment in the second half.
But unlike our inclinations to judges as humans based on difference or prejudice or acceptance of some and not of the others, the bridesmaids are all equal. They're all present, they're all invited. It's the preparedness or the indifference to preparedness or even the indifference to expectation that makes them one and the other.
So what if this parable isn't about Jesus coming in the imaginary clouds? I mean, think of the birth of Jesus Christ, how humble and ordinary and unexpected.
So what if this parable isn't about some triumphant return of Jesus Christ?

What if this parable is not about some being brought out and some left out? What if this parable is no different for us even 2000 years after the life of Jesus Christ? What if this parable in Matthew is about being ready, watching, keeping awake for an unfolding, revealing of God, of spirit in new ways and not simply just in some distant time off and away, but in the present and in our own ordinary lives?

What if this parable in Matthew is about being ready is watching, keeping awake for an unfolding of God, of spirit in new ways and not simply off in the distant, but here in the present amongst our own lives. If we put it like that, then I'm sure we can see ourselves, even our churches in many different ways amongst the bridesmaids of this parable and not just those who were prepared. Being prepared, open, aware of God's unfolding and way amongst us is a place of pondering and reflection. Indeed. And sometimes we say even think that we are open, open to what God is doing, but really our thoughts are more our own ideas than anything else like bridesmaids who say we are prepared but our oil is low. And sometimes we assume we know what God is doing, like being certain of when the bridegroom will arrive, but there's a certain arrogance in that which can easily be found in ourselves and in the church. And sometimes we fall into doubt. Just like the heavy sleep of a bridesmaid, sometimes our lamps begin to fade out.

I would suggest that pondering thinking, being awake and prepared is not about knowing And It's not about doing. They're both common distractions. It's not about order or structure, but more so just about dwelling and listening, looking with expectation of the present, God un unfolding something unexpected amongst our lives.

May you have a time and a place for pondering this parable. Read it again, and a time and a place for dwelling and listening and looking for God present and amongst us and unfolding new ways, new things, new life. Amen.

SING Have Faith in God, my Heart TIS619, Tune 234

Have faith in God, my heart,
trust and be unafraid;
God will fulfil in every part
each promise he has made.

Have faith in God, my mind,
though oft your light burns low;
God's mercy holds a wiser plan
than you can fully know.

Have faith in God, my soul,
his cross for ever stands;
and neither life nor death can pluck
his children from his hands.

Lord Jesus, make me whole;
grant me no resting place
until I rest, heart, mind and soul,
the captive of your grace.

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OFFERTORY PRAYER

We bring what we have,
small acts, small gifts, small faith.
Trusting that you, O God,
can grow these
into something lasting and full of light.
Receive what we offer,
And use it for your love.
Amen,

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of quiet faithfulness,
we bring before you those who are waiting,
those waiting for healing,

for answers,
for change.
Be near to them.
For those who feel unprepared for what life has brought,
give courage.
For those who are grieving,
hold them in hope that does not rush or force.
For our world,
where urgency often replaces wisdom,
teach us patience,
and deeper attention.
And for ourselves,
form in us a faith that endures.

As we pray for others, we look forward with hope.
God of promise: we think of the promise of the church united, the witness to the
wider world of inclusion and tolerance, of diverse communities worshipping in freedom and joy.
Let us name in silent prayer those churches and places known to us……..
Silence
God of faithful love: we think of the faithful love of people in your church who have shared love and care with us in the past and continue to shape the future by
their care and love.
Let us name in silent prayer those people and places known to us…….
Silence
God of justice: we think of steadfast stands for justice, for action and prayer wrought by many who seek to live out a just and joyful future.
Let us name in silent prayer those situations known to
us……Silence
God of hope: we think of hopeful opportunities, the way your spirit brings new beginnings and fresh insights in life. We think of signs and stories around us that
you are always working in and through God's people.
Let us name in silent prayer those people and places known to
us……..Silence
Let promise, faith, justice and hope be our future story. Amen.

SING God has spoken by the Prophets TIS/158

God has spoken by the prophets,
spoken God's unchanging word,
each, from age to age proclaiming
God, the one, the righteous Lord.
In the world's despair and turmoil
one firm anchor holds us fast:

God is king, God's throne eternal,
God the first. and God the last.

God has spoken by Christ Jesus,
Christ, the everlasting Son,
brightness in 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 God's 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, God's word unchanging,
God the first, and God the last.

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BLESSING

Go now, not in fear of being unready, but in trust of what God is forming in you.
Go slowly.
Go attentively.
Go with courage.
And may the God who meets you in the waiting, the Christ who calls you to stay awake, and the spirit who kindles your light go with you, now and always. Amen.

SENDING OUT SONG One more step ATA/200

One more step along the world I go,
one more step along the world I go,
from the old things to the new
keep me travelling along with you.
And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me travelling along with you.

Round the corners of the world I turn,
more and more about the world I learn.
All the new things that I see,
you'll be looking at along with me:

And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me travelling along with you.

As I travel through the bad and good,
keep me travelling the way I should.
Where I see no way to go,
you'll be telling me the way, I know:
And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me travelling along with you.

Give me courage when the world is rough,
keep me loving though the world is tough.
Leap and sing in all I do,
keep me travelling along with you:
And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me travelling along with you.

You are older than the world can be,
you are younger than the life in me.
Ever old and ever new,
keep me travelling along with you:
And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me travelling along with you.

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