

The Vine

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Remembrance Sunday) – Year A

Call to worship

Gracious God, on this day closest to Remembrance Day, we pause to remember those who have died because of wars and violence.

Let us be still for a moment now.

[Quiet].

We will remember them. Amen.¹

Hymn: 696 STF – For the healing of the nations

Opening Prayers

Loving God, we come this morning to remember.

We come together with our individual and collective memories.

We remember that you are with us, indeed that you have called us here.

We come with memories that are painful and difficult, we come with debates and politics that are complex, we come with our limited understanding of wars past and present.

Loving God, we come to remember those who have died in wars, and we come to give thanks for the gift of life.

Gather us as we remember.

Forgive us as we remember.

Accept us as we remember.

Amen.²

We now say the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Matthew 25:1-13

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids^[a] took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.^[b] ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those bridesmaids^[c] got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But 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.’ ¹⁰ And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were

¹ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

² Taken from Gathering Prayers for Remembrance Sunday by Christine Dutton

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ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹ Later the other bridesmaids^[d] came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹² But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' ¹³ Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.³

Reflections on the readings

Today's reflection is offered by Lansford Penn-Timothy, the Deputy Superintendent at Westminster Central Hall.

There is a very famous Nigerian proverb that says, "The spider that knows what it will gain sits waiting patiently in its web".

Our Bible passage today invites us to think about the words 'WAIT' or 'waiting', and to think about what we will need in the waiting time.

In today's passage, Jesus told the parable of the ten bridesmaids. The core message of this parable is "to be ready", to be prepared for a long or short waiting time.

From the parable we see that they were all on the same journey, they all had lamps, they were all waiting expectantly for the same bridegroom. They all had one responsibility, and that was to make sure they kept their lamps burning until the bridegroom came.

They waited and waited for the bridegroom, but I quote "the bridegroom was a long time coming". As a result of the long delay, the bridesmaids were tired; they became drowsy and fell asleep. Five were ready for a long wait; they took extra oil with them. Jesus refers to them as "wise". The other five were not quite as prepared, they did not take extra oil with them. So when the bridegroom arrived, their lamps had gone out and they were locked out of the wedding banquet.

For us today, it feels as though we all need to have extra oil for the waiting time. How long can we wait to return to total freedom and normality; if we can remember what normality is? How long can we wait for God's healing and deliverance?

In the place of waiting, we too can get drowsy and fall asleep. I am sure some of us have been or are in that place where we feel as though we have been waiting on God, praying and asking God for help, but 'he is a long time coming'. In a place of waiting, we can get tired. Some of us are extremely tired. We want God to come and sort things out for us; things need sorting out in our lives, our homes, business, relationships, jobs, in the nation and the world.

What we are going through, will one day become a thing of the past. So let us wait on him, the bridegroom of the Church, the healer, the deliverer.

The Prophet Isaiah further encouraged us with these words, I quote; "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint."

³ Bible Text is from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved

When John Wesley was asked what he would do if he knew his Lord would return at that time the next day. He said in effect, “I would go to bed and go to sleep; wake up in the morning, and go on with my work, for I would want Him to find me doing what he had appointed.”

As we wait for the arrival of the bridegroom, may our strength be renewed and our lamps refilled, as we step out doing what he has appointed; doing good, and sharing the good news and God’s resources with the needy and the deprived in our community.

As we wait for the arrival of the bridegroom, may our strength be renewed and our lamps refilled as we engage in prayer, reflection and meditation on God’s word.

As we wait for the arrival of the bridegroom, may our strength be renewed and our lamps refilled as we wait on the Lord for our healing, deliverance, blessing, freedom and answers to prayer.

From the time of our salvation and the time of our meeting with the bridegroom, all we have got to do, brothers and sisters, is to keep refuelling, recharging, refilling and renewing our relationship with God, so that we continue to shine for Jesus in this world which can feel like a dark place sometimes.

As we pray and wait patiently for God’s healing and deliverance, let us keep our lamps burning and take encouragement and strength from Paul’s last words to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 15:58. “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain”.⁴

Some questions for reflection / discussion:

- What about you, can you remember a time you had to wait patiently? How did it make you feel?
- To what extent does this time of Coronavirus feel like a ‘waiting time’, and how does Lansford’s reflection help us with processing that?
- What is it that you can do in your community, family or neighbourhood, whilst waiting?

Prayers of intercession

As we pray today I invite you to use your poppy, either by detaching it or holding it where it is. If you don’t have a poppy with you, please picture one in your mind.

Let us pray.

First, we hold one of the petals of the poppy. Father, the red of this petal is like the red of the blood shed by so many in the wars of the last century. We remember members of our family who were directly involved in those wars, some in the armed forces, some left behind. We remember injury, trauma, death, courage, fear – lives changed forever. We give thanks for so many who were prepared to pay the highest price of all

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

⁴ Reflection written by Lansford Penn-Timothy

Now we take hold of another petal on our poppy. In doing so, we hold before God the violence and warfare of our own times. We pray, Father, that you will give us politicians and military leaders equal to the huge tasks they face – wise in judgement, calm in spirit, makers of peace.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Now we touch the centre of the poppy, the place where the seeds are kept, ready for new life. Lord, take the seeds of peace which lie in the hearts of your people everywhere, and cast them generously over every continent and nation. Let those seeds germinate, grow and flourish.

Beat our swords into ploughshares, our spears into pruning hooks and our weapons of mass destruction into technologies for peace.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Now we hold the green leaf (or the green stem) and remember the green and growing hope which comes from faith alone, faith in a God for whom everything is possible, even in the darkest hour. May hope guide our politics, our nation, our thinking and our lives. May hope draw us ever nearer to that day when the world shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

In your mercy, forgive our foolish ways,
In your mercy, help us to listen before we fight,
In your mercy, hold back the men of war,
In your mercy, save the innocent,
In your mercy, hear us,
In your mercy, In your mercy.

Amen.⁵

Hymn: 463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past

Blessing

May the God who mourns with his people, the Son who sacrificed his own life that we might experience the depths of God's love and the Holy Spirit whose presence of peace never leaves us, bless us all today, tomorrow and forever. Amen.⁶

⁵ Taken from The Second Intercessions Handbook by John Pritchard

⁶ Taken from Gathering Prayers for Remembrance Sunday by Christine Dutton