

SERMON

Matthew 25:1-13

Persevering in the Midst of Distractions

Nunawading and Waverley, 8-11-20

Dear friends in Christ,

When I listened to this parable as a boy, I felt sorry for the five unwise young women against whom the door was shut and they hear the words of doom from the bridegroom, **I am telling you the truth, I do not know you.** They were only a small amount of oil short of what they required. It was just a last-minute thing that went wrong. In my innocence, I had overlooked that this was more serious than a simple mistake. The unwise young women had only come prepared for a short wait. Their hearts were not in the task given to them and really didn't care to honour the bridegroom by lining the street for him.

Before our Lord Jesus went to his cross, he took the disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane and told them to wait. He selected three, Peter, James and John to support him as he prayed to his Father. Three times he came to them and three times he found them asleep! He said, **Watch and pray so that you do not fall into temptation.** As salvation was coming to the world, the disciples couldn't stay on task. Our Lord is asking us to do the same, to watch for him and pray as his visible salvation could arrive suddenly at any time.

What distracts us from the tasks of discipleship? Jesus is calling his church to persevere in them till he returns at the end of all things and manifests his kingdom to the world in all its glory and beauty. Your friends could be a negative influence on you. I am sure they wouldn't interfere with your faith and practice of Christianity but they may not support you either. We need encouragement, the church and Christians friends urging us on to serve Christ. Perhaps the effort of witness, attending worship, teaching children, maintaining a devotional life, and using spiritual gifts to build up the church all seems too much. For me, it is my agenda. It is so easy to be filled with what I want to do, to shop, or meet a friend, talk about myself or complete a project around the house that my mind switches from Christ to me. For other Christians, it may be pursuing the attractive things the world can offer, wealth, career, popularity, drugs etc.

This year has taught us to think about what is truly important. What is the meaning of our existence? How should I use the time I have? The big questions of the universe have confronted us: a bushfire crisis wiping out millions of hectares and thousands of homes, a pandemic infecting millions, killing hundreds of thousands and stopping economies across the world. China shutting out Australia's exports. Where do we find strength to persevere?

The age-old answer Christians have is a victory over the brokenness of our world and of our lives obtained by the immense suffering of God for us and an even stronger manifestation of his love and power in raising his Son from the dead. Because of these things, ahead of us is the excitement of the **wedding banquet**, of meeting **the bridegroom**, finally holding him as Mary Magdalene did outside the tomb. We look forward to sharing in the joy of all those millions and millions of believers who have persevered. They endured **and won the crown of eternal life**.

The warning is that time comes to an end and the opportunity to work for Christ ceases. At that moment, our chance to hand over our lives to him for his use, is gone, **the door is shut**.

Isn't it strange that our Lord should talk about oil? Energy and fuel are the preoccupations of our age, especially clean energy. Insufficient spiritual reserves are concerns for Christians. The Holy Spirit in us is a deep well that goes far underground and all we need do is keep drawing from that well. It is there within you. It is the well for strength, for zeal, for enthusiasm and commitment. What is outside of us will fail us in the end but what the Spirit gives us inside, will last forever. All we need do is to keep coming back to him so that we can persevere.