

Matthew 25: 1-13 WISE AND FOOLISH BRIDESMAIDS
Joshua 24 – CHOOSE THIS DAY

Even though I want to concentrate on the parable today I can't let the Joshua reading go by. Last week we saw Joshua as a young man, newly leading the people of God after Moses' death....watched as the priests stood in the water of the Jordan, holding the ark of the covenant, as the waters parted and the people, led by young Joshua, crossed over into the land

Joshua – sign of hope that God will provide leadership we need when we need it – in his very being a sign that the promise continues, and that the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachael, Moses and Miriam, Hagar and Leah, Ishmael and Aaron....*God of the covenant and the Exodus*, is still God, and
God keeps promises.

When Moses died, they didn't know what would happen to them. He had been their leader – forever. But God provided Joshua – and the promise continued.

And after centuries*centuries* of trusting the promise to A and S – the promise of three things: (what were those three things again?)

After trusting through hard HARD times
and generations of the faithful who did not live to see it come true
FINALLY they have entered the land, under the leadership of Joshua
and now –
Joshua's time is over. He knows it, and he's asking them now to be very, very clear.

Now you have what you have longed for all your lives
and now is the time to focus.

It's one thing to ache for something you don't have.....when that's been true for a long time, you can become so ...*identified* with that wish, that longing...that it starts to define you and then when you finally get what you have longed for – who are you now? What will be the centre of your life now that you have what you want?
You need to regroup – almost redefine who you are...do you know what I mean?

I think that is at least in part what we're seeing Joshua do right here.
Now you're in the land. Now you have what you and our ancestors have longed for
and now – now what? Be very clear – now you have a choice. Figure out who you are, who you serve and how you're going to live. Choose and choose now. And if you think it's not a choice...well...think again. He says choose this day whom you will serve. Lots of choices out there. As for me – I'm going to serve God.

It's very good stuff, this, and deserves more than I've given it right here.
But I want to move to the parable.
Let's read it again.

READ IT MATTHEW 25: 1-13

This is the kind of parable that makes me want to write a different ending....that would be a lot of fun at Bible study someday. How would YOU end this parable so that it could fulfil what Jesus started out to say “the kingdom of heaven is like this”maybe it’s like....they shared their oil and all went to the wedding

Or they decided not to burn the oil because it’s bad for the earth and they built a bonfire so everyone could see

Or they decided to wait for morning

But Jesus says the kingdom is like this – and tells this, to me, uncomfortable story. That’s part of what’s so great about Jesus’ stories though....they get under your skin, they’re not always warm and fuzzy, and they make us think. I’d be interested in what your thoughts are.

A small bit of background here: weddings, in Jesus' day, went on for days. The actual ceremony often happened at night, because of the heat. Something I read this week said that it was poor people who had weddings at night because of the heat, whereas rich people had slaves and servants to fan them. Anyway, the wedding customs involved the bride and the young women of the family, and her friends, waiting at the bride's home....and the groom and his friends went to her home to greet her, and then they would escort her to their new home. And rather than have a certain time for the ceremony, part of the fun was that the groom and his friends could decide when to arrive, and the women had to be ready. It became a game to guess when they'd arrive, and to watch for them coming. So this is what's happening here.

I want to focus on just one thing that comes to me from this parable:

If you compare how we do weddings today, with a definite date and time (Saturday at 3 pm) with how they did them then, (just be ready for when it happens)

Life in general is more like the latter don't you think?

The truth is, we just never know what's going to happen and when. Life is very uncertain... and we don't know. We don't know when there will be an opportunity, an occasion, and opening or an event that will completely change everything.

We don't know when the groom is going to show up

We don't know when something wonderful is going to happen
and when things are not good

we never know when there will be an opening, a chance, a breakthrough or a moment when things might change; when something new might be created
when the bridegroom might arrive. You know?

Today we are preparing for Remembrance Day and discussing as a national family our treatment of veterans. Later we're going to hear about one of the national gatherings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There are so many things in the world that need to be changed. Sometimes we get tired, give up on the thought that things might change and we fall asleep.

We don't know when in the life of the world, there will be a window....a moment unlike anything that's gone before, when something will happen: there will be a chance for peace, a chance to build relationships, a remarkable opportunity to change the way we live together in the world.

Things are NOT predictable and they are not set
and we simply don't know what's coming next.

And so, I think this is saying

Make sure you have what you need in yourself to be ready

make sure you have oil in your lamp

so that when something unexpected and astounding happens you can respond in a way that increases love, that holds life high. Have oil in your lamp so you can first of all recognize what it is that's come your way....see the way ahead, see the possibilities inherent in that moment.

I don't know what that means for you. What oil do you need? What is it that you need so that you can be ready...as equipped as you can be to respond to whatever might come your way? Is your lamp full? Could it get you through a long night?

Would your lamp allow you to see the way forward?

What do you need to fill your lamp?

For me at least, the basics are: taking care of my body, enough rest, enough exercise and wise choices about my health. As important as that is that I make sure I'm not alone; that, this parable notwithstanding, I have people around me who will share their oil when mine has run out as it does from time to time, and with whom I will share mine....people who are positive and kind and surround me with what matters most. Hope and friendship and compassion....

That is oil for my lamp that will equip me to get through many long nights.

Above and through all that, a deep sense of who I truly am; what is the centre and focus of my life

Jesus tells us to love God, love neighbours and love ourselves.

Joshua tells us to choose who we will serve

I choose to serve God.

May God bless you as you make your own choices

Amen