



12 NOVEMBER 2023

Welcome to church this morning,
we hope you enjoy being with us.

Lectionary Readings

This week 12 November, 2023

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25
Psalm 78:1-7
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25:1-13

Next week 19 November, 2023

Judges 4:1-7
Psalm 123
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Matthew 25:14-30

World Vision Reports

We have received an update for each of our World Vision children highlighting what has been achieved in their communities in the last year. The reports, with an updated photo, are on the back notice board if you would like to read them.

All shall be well, all shall be well... For there is a Force of love moving through the universe That holds us fast and will never let us go."

Saint Julian of Norwich (c.a. 1342-1416)

Christmas Collection

This year we are planning to collect Christmas food items for our Hands and Feet clients; items such as chocolates, shortbread, Advent Calendars, mince tarts, nuts, etc.

We will need the Advent Calendars by Sunday 24th November and the other items by Sunday 10 December.

If you would like to contribute please bring your items to church any Sunday and leave them in the basket at the back of the church.

CHOOSE YOU THIS
DAY WHOM YE WILL SERVE...
BUT AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE,
WE WILL
SERVE THE

Lord

JOSHUA 24:15



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The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

In worship this week we will look at the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids. Jesus tells his followers this story directly after describing the signs of the End of the Age. In Matthew's gospel these readings can be found in chapters twenty four and twenty five and I have to confess I find them difficult to read and difficult to understand. I also observe that right throughout my attendance in worship, my years spent lay preaching and my years spent in theological study and training, the issues raised in these chapters are overlooked. To study such texts we enter into the doctrine of last things (Eschatology) but this doctrine, particularly within our denomination, sits like a poorly neglected book on a shelf gathering dust. (This is despite there being an Eschatological underpinning of our founding document the Basis of Union. Read it here and note the affirmations that Jesus will come again peppered throughout several of its paragraphs: <https://uniting.church/basisofunion/#way>)

There are probably many reasons why this has happened. First, I think we have attempted to distance ourselves from the fanatics who over the centuries have claimed the world is ending on December 21st, 2012 (the Maya Apocalypse,) sometime in the 1910 (Halley's' Comet) or sometime within the year 1666 (Revelation 13:18) to name just a few. Guess what, they were all wrong! During the week I wanted to get a Jewish perspective on Jesus' parables in Matthew 25, so I did some googling and landed on a site that interpreted the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids as an analogy of each stage of the end times, right down to pinpointing the year. Jesus said, 'about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father', but in an act of extraordinary hair splitting and text proofing (making a text support an argument) the author of the webpage suggested Jesus didn't say anything about not knowing the year. Really!

The second reason I think we shy away from Eschatological texts is our denominations focus on living the way of Christ in the here and now. We have pushed back against the 'escapist' form of faith, which can lead to a sense of apathy about caring for the world and its people because Jesus will come back any day now and fix everything. Really! This is just being lazy, this reminds me of those slack bridesmaids that didn't care enough to have their oil jars filled to the brim (Matthew 25:3).

Although there are valid reasons for our hesitance to engage with End Times theology this week I have found myself thinking about Jesus return, and I have been asking God, 'how long, how long will you let us destroy this planet and one another'. After watching just one news broadcast, our hearts can be filled with such dismay and sadness at the sinfulness of humankind, we may wonder how we can keep going. Matthew's Gospel addresses people like us who wonder 'how long', and although chapters twenty four and twenty five are difficult to read, they do offer us the reassurance that God is still in control. God has not forgotten us, and Jesus will return at the right time, in God's good time.

When the world and its sorrows threaten to overwhelm us we are wise to remember the words of Julian of Norwich, who lived through the horrors of the Black plague, regarded as the worst catastrophe the world has ever experienced. Julian asks the Lord, 'why was sin not prevented'. In her silent prayer she hears Jesus reply, 'It was necessary that there should be sin; but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.' Amen to that!