

BIBLE READINGS

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety", destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

The Parable of the Bags of Gold

Matthew 25:14-20

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.'

REFLECTION

Last week we read the parable of ten women with lamps waiting for the bridegroom's arrival. Some brought oil to top up their lamps, so they could wait, others did not and so missed the bridegroom's arrival as they went to get more. The parable reminds us, the kingdom of heaven, (which we pray for regularly in the Lord's prayer) would be coming and therefore, also reminds us to be attentive - prepared - looking out for the signs of the kingdom so that we don't miss the very thing we've prayed for when it does arrive!

This week, through the passage from 1 Thessalonians, we are encouraged again to stay alert to God. We're reminded of his promise: 'the Lord will return - he will come back. Again, like the women of last week's story (Matt 25:1-13), we don't know exactly when, and in fact 1Thess 1:1 suggests we don't need to know exactly when rather we simply need to ready ourselves for whenever that is - to *live* expectantly.

Silly example, but if there was a cake in the oven and I told you it was ready - that'd be good news (presuming you like cake of course!)? However, if you don't have oven gloves handy, you're going to be hard pushed to enjoy what it is I've given you.

Sense would be - soon as I'd told you I'd be leaving a cake in the oven - that you'd get your oven gloves out, buy a pair or ask to borrow right? Making sure you were prepared to receive what I'd promised. Same kind of thing applies to the arrival of the Lord, who will come again, and all the things of his kingdom. Not that you need oven gloves (obviously), but that you need to be prepared and positioned to receive and welcome him and the goodness of his kingdom.

Though it may be obvious, it seems appropriate to note that the things of his kingdom won't necessarily look like cake. What may be less obvious is they also may *not* look like wealth, promotion, or an incredible social life, it may not look like acceptance from others... I wonder if the signs of the kingdom coming might look a lot more like someone who's isolated, but actually been bold enough to ask you for help; someone poorly who's feeling scared and alone, but has asked you to pray....

Let us be alert to these signs, which themselves are invitations for us, our prayer and action, opportunities to remember that the King is coming, and that as he promises, when we seek him in each strange situation we are very likely to find him! And so will be able to point the others we meet alongside us (on the strange roads we find ourselves) to his work.

Thessalonians encourages us to live READY. Today's parable reminds us not to bury our gold in the sand waiting until it's all over, or until the master returns... but to employ the resources we have (e.g. *time* to phone and chat with others; *skills*, in IT helping others get connected; *driving*, to fetch others shopping; *intellect* - reimagining the way you/ others live/ work, in order to offer different, more environmentally/ financially/ emotionally sustainable options; you may have *joy*, and be great in bringing that to others in a time where much of the arts industry is on pause etc), investing these talents/ gifts now... that all will see the kingdom of God is coming, and close at hand.

Thessalonians was written to those who'd risked all to follow Christ, pursuing him and all the things of his kingdom, those who had turned away from one way of life and the habits and practices that brought no good, nor glorified God. It was written because struggle had hit and it was becoming harder to follow Christ because of the costly implications. Today's reading provided encouragement for them, not to retreat back into their former ways of living, or old habits but to persist walking in The Way of the Lord.

'So then let us not be like others who are asleep but let us be awake and sober.' As 'children of the light', let us be (as other bible translations say) 'self-controlled' live expectantly, ready to recognise the signs. We've clarified they don't need to put on oven gloves... but *they are* to 'put on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.' As the nights draw in, we must ensure we are not consumed by the darkness and lulled to sleep, but must be strong in the Lord; dressed, ready, to meet the king.