

Confirmation 2020

Matthew 25:1-13 *Parable of the wise and foolish girls*

The kingdom of heaven is like what happened one night when ten girls took their oil lamps and went to a wedding to meet the groom. Five of the girls were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps, but no extra oil. The ones who were wise took along extra oil for their lamps. The groom was late arriving, and the girls became drowsy and fell asleep. Then in the middle of the night someone shouted, "Here's the groom! Come to meet him!"

When the girls got up and started getting their lamps ready, the foolish ones said to the others, "Let us have some of your oil! Our lamps are going out."

The girls who were wise answered, "There's not enough oil for all of us! Go and buy some for yourselves."

While the foolish girls were on their way to get some oil, the groom arrived. The girls who were ready went into the wedding, and the doors were closed. Later the other girls returned and shouted, "Sir, sir! Open the door for us!"

But the groom replied, "I don't even know you!"

So, my disciples, always be ready! You don't know the day or the time when all this will happen.

Dear Friend, this is my last chance to use my favourite illustration at a Confirmation service, so here it is.

Question: Why do we paint fire-engines red?

Answer: It's historical. Fire engines regularly had six wheels and six firemen. Six plus six is twelve. There are twelve inches in a ruler. Queen Elizabeth is a ruler. Queen Elizabeth is also a ship. Ships sail on the sea. The sea has fish in it. Fish have fins. The Finns fought the Russians. Russians are red. That's why we paint fire-engines red.

Isn't it fascinating how we can come up with the weirdest reasons to justify what we do?

In the past, I've related this illustration to the myth concerning confirmation, which says "once a person is confirmed they no longer need the support of parents, godparents, and the Christian family."

Today is an important step in the faith journey of these young Christians but they're just starting the journey and they still need our support. They should never feel as though they're on their own. Their faith and ours is personal but not private. Christian faith isn't a solo adventure.

The Christian family exists to love one another, to pray for one another, to encourage one another and to support one another. We need these young people to help us know how to be the family of God and they need us as well. We're an incomplete family without these young people.

We heard Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish girls. Boys this parable is for us as well. What can we learn from this parable on Confirmation Day? Does it expose any myths which could mess with our thinking? Any beliefs or ideas we just naturally turn to in order to explain how things are in life.

Forgive me young people, if I've added to this myth by making you write a faith statement, but one of the great modern myths is that faith is intellectual assent to a proposition, agreeing in my mind the Christian faith is correct.

So, I propose, “God loves us and has sent Jesus to be our Saviour.” If we say, “Sounds good and correct, we agree.” Do we now have “faith”? We might say yes, but it’s not the faith Jesus calls for. Jesus doesn’t want our ‘agreement’, he wants our love. Jesus doesn’t just want our head, he wants all of us. He doesn’t want us to just obey his rules, he wants a relationship with us.

Christian faith is about a relationship. Living in relationship with Jesus, with God.

Jesus has done everything for us so we can be part of God’s eternal family. So we can be children of God. How is it possible to even imagine we could believe Jesus did it all for us but not want to know him, not want to have a relationship with him? Friends, we can’t have the gift without the giver. We can’t have the gift of salvation, without a relationship with the Saviour who is the giver.

Faith doesn’t save us. What we believe doesn’t save us. Jesus does. Jesus saves us and faith takes hold of the gracious gift of salvation and makes it real, makes it ours.

Salvation is a free gift, which invites a free response of faith. Jesus gives us a new start, makes us new. Makes us children of God and invites us to live as if we believed it. One of the songs we sing says “I’m a child of God, yes, I am. I am who you say I am.”

The groom said to the girls who came late, “I don’t know you!” There’s no knowing, no relationship. Since faith is a relationship with God, there’ll come a point at which he’ll say the relationship does or doesn’t exist. Have we said yes or no? We can’t go on forever saying maybe.

This year we used Youth Alpha as part of the course. In one session we considered the question of our closeness to God. The creators of Youth Alpha used the picture of a swimming pool to illustrate. It showed people near the pool, with a toe in the water, swimming in the pool, and so on. We were asked to compare how close we felt to God with the characters around and in the pool. How close are we to God? How healthy is our relationship to God?

In the parable, the shocking sentence, “Truly, I say to you, I do not know you,” is simply a statement of fact. It’s the truth of their condition. He doesn’t say, “I never invited you.” He doesn’t say, “I never loved you.” He doesn’t say, “I never drew you to myself.” He only says, “I never knew you - because you never bothered to know me.”

Those who are enjoying the wedding party at the end of the parable are those who know the groom. Could it be they knew the groom well enough to know they’d need extra oil because he was always late? They knew him. Did people used to joke about him being late for his own wedding?

Those who enjoy the presence and blessing of Jesus and have the hope of eternal life are those who know him. They don’t know about him, they know him. They don’t just know how to quote him, they know him. They haven’t just read about him, or heard about him, they know him.

They’ve felt Jesus’ love. They’ve experienced Jesus’ forgiveness. They’ve experienced his grace. They know they don’t deserve to be loved by him but they know they are loved by him. They know Jesus loves them. Knowing Jesus makes them wise.

Oscar, Jesus loves you. Bow, Jesus loves you. Olivia, Jesus loves you. Flynn, Jesus loves you. Jack, Jesus loves you. Adelaide, Jesus loves you. Ellie, Jesus loves you. Lilly, Jesus loves you. Ryan, Jesus loves you. I’m thankful for the love we’ve shared this year, for the relationship we’ve established. But above all I’m thankful for Jesus’ love for you, for me, and for us all.

Jesus said, “My sheep know my voice, I know them and they follow me, and I give them eternal life. John 10:27f. Thank you, Jesus. That’s wisdom. Be wise young friends! Amen.