



23RD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Pentecost 23

November 08, 2020
Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace
www.stjohnsraymondterrace.org

PENTECOST 23

Pray:

May I speak to you in the name of GOD – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen



Our passage from Joshua today is part of his final speech to the Israelites. He called all the Israelites to Shechem to hear his final words. He challenged the people to make a conscious choice to always serve GOD. Soon afterward, Joshua died.

The Israelites had to decide whether they would obey the LORD – who had proven His trustworthiness; or obey the local gods – which were only man-made idols. It's easy to slip into a quiet rebellion – going about life in our own way. But the time comes when we must choose who or what will control us. And it is our choice. Will it be GOD? Or will it be our own limited personality or another imperfect substitute. Once we have chosen to be controlled by GOD's Spirit, we need to re-affirm our choice each day.

In taking a definite stand for the LORD, Joshua again displayed his spiritual leadership. Regardless of what others decided, Joshua has made a commitment to GOD – and he was willing to set the example of living by that decision. The way we live shows others the strength of our commitment to serving GOD.

All the people boldly claimed that they would never forsake the LORD. But they did not keep that promise. Very soon GOD would charge them with breaking their contract with Him. Talk is cheap. It is easy to say that we will follow GOD; but it is much more important to live like it. Yet the nation followed GOD through Joshua's lifetime – a great tribute to Joshua's faith in GOD and powerful leadership.

Joshua told the Israelites to throw away their foreign gods, or idols. To follow GOD requires destroying whatever gets in the way of worshipping Him. We have our own form of idols – greed, wrong priorities, jealousies, prejudices – that get in the way of worshipping GOD. GOD is not satisfied if we merely hide

these idols. We must completely remove them from our lives.

The covenant between Israel and GOD was that the people would worship and obey the LORD alone. Their purpose was to become a holy nation that would influence the rest of the world for GOD. The conquest for Canaan was a means to achieve this purpose – but Israel became preoccupied with the land and lost sight of the LORD GOD. The same thing can happen in our lives. We can spend so much time on the means that we forget the end – which is to glorify GOD.

Our passage from the Psalms is a contemplative poem of Asaph – one of King David's chief musicians. Asaph retells the history of the Jewish nation from the time of slavery in Egypt to the reign of King David – a period of about 400 years. It was told over and over to each generation so they would not forget GOD and make the same mistakes as their ancestors.

The apostle Paul tells us in the passage from 1 Thessalonians that Christian living is more than simply

loving other Christians. We must be responsible in all areas of life. Some of the Thessalonian Christians had adopted a life of idleness, depending on others for handouts. Some Greeks looked down on manual labour. So, Paul told the Thessalonians to work hard and live a quiet life. We can't be effective in sharing our faith with others if we are not respected. Whatever we do, we need to do it faithfully and be a positive force in society.

The Thessalonians were wondering why many of their fellow believers had died and what would happen to them when CHRIST returned. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to understand that death is not the end of the story. When CHRIST returns, ALL believers – dead and alive – will be reunited, never to suffer or die again.

Knowing exactly when the dead will be raised , in relation to the other events at the second coming, is not as important as knowing when Paul wrote these words – to challenge believers to comfort and encourage one another when loved ones die. This passage can be a great comfort when any believer dies. The same love

that should unite believers in this life will unite believers when CHRIST returns and reigns for eternity.

Because JESUS CHRIST came back to life, so will all believers. All Christians, including those living when CHRIST returns, will live with CHRIST forever. Therefore, we need not despair when loved ones die or world events take a tragic turn. GOD will turn our tragedies into triumphs, our poverty to riches, our pain to glory, and our defeat to victory. All believers throughout history will stand reunited in GOD's very presence, safe and secure. As Paul comforted the Thessalonians with the promise of the Resurrection, so we should comfort and reassure each other with this great hope.

JESUS told a series of parables to clarify further what it means to be ready for His return and how to live until He comes. In our gospel today – the story of the 10 virgins, we are taught that every person is responsible for his or her own spiritual condition. This parable is about a wedding. On the wedding day the bridegroom went to the bride's house for the ceremony; then the bride and

groom, along with a great procession, returned to the groom's house where a feast took place – often lasting for a week. These 10 virgins were waiting to join the procession, and they hoped to take part in the wedding banquet. But when the groom didn't come at the expected time, 5 of them were out of lamp oil. By the time they had purchased extra oil, it was too late to join the feast.

When JESUS returns to take His people to heaven, we must be ready. Spiritual preparation cannot be bought or borrowed at the last minute. Our relationship with GOD must be our own.



Irish Comedian Hal Roach once said: “live each day as though it will be your last – and one day you’ll be right!” as JESUS clarifies in today’s parable, we do not know when our time on earth is up or even when today’s world will cease to exist. This is why JESUS tells us to make the most of the present and not to leave important things that can be done today until tomorrow. But it’s not just

about living life to the full or making the most of our opportunities. It's what we do with that time on earth – living as disciples of CHRIST and serving others – that will help us towards GOD's kingdom.

Have you had an experience of not being prepared? What happened as a result?

In today's parable, 5 of the girls were not very good bridesmaids, were they? In JESUS' time, the bridesmaids did not accompany the bride down the aisle. Instead, they helped her by watching for the arrival of her husband-to-be. Then the bridesmaids accompanied the groom as he made his way into the town. The groom could arrive anytime – so it was important for the bridesmaids to have lamps and enough oil in case he came after dark.

The bridegroom in the story represents JESUS. His arrival will signify His second coming in all His glory at the end of time. After 2000 years, it can seem as if JESUS' return is much delayed – but our faith assures us that in the fullness of time JESUS will indeed return.

Of what “OIL” does JESUS need us to ensure we have a good supply? The oil represents our good deeds and our faith. Each day JESUS gives us opportunities to serve Him and our brothers and sisters in CHRIST in the way we think, speak and act. How many of these opportunities do we take? How many do we ignore by filling our time with other ... STUFF? The wise bridesmaids realise that the groom could come at any moment – so they must be constantly prepared to meet him. They represent people who are faithful disciples of JESUS. As these faithful disciples wait for GOD to return, they prepare for it in service to others.

We need to answer the following questions:

Who could use a phone a phone call or a helping hand today?

Is there a relative or a friend we haven't spoken to in a while?

Is there a local organisation we can support to help others who are less fortunate than ourselves?

What steps can we take this week to begin answering these calls to service?

All of us need to be spiritually ready. We are called to act as JESUS calls us to act ALL THE TIME so that when He comes again, He will see that we have made the best use of our time on earth. St John of the Cross was a Spanish Catholic priest, mystic, and a Carmelite friar during the 1500's and he said that "in the evening of life we will be judged on love." We will be judged IN the love of GOD – but we will also be judged according to HOW we have loved. We must practice love in the ordinary circumstances of life so that when the great revelation of love comes at our death, we can respond with love. The foolish girls can tell you that it wasn't fun to be left standing outside while there was a party going on inside. We certainly don't want to be locked out of heaven.



May we pray:

Heavenly Father, we place our trust in You as we prepare to meet Your Son JESUS CHRIST, when He returns in glory. Grant us the courage to be strong in our waiting and deepen our faith as we live each day in hope, this we pray in the name of JESUS. Amen

Life Application Study Bible

GOD's Word 2020

Daily Prayer 2020

Celebrating the Lectionary Year A – Garratt Publishing – p238