

PENTECOST 23, SUNDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2020, PRINCE OF PEACE

Text: Matthew 25:10-13 10 And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. 11 Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' 12 But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' 13 Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.



1.0 As a society, we are obsessed with Do-It-Yourself renovation shows; House Rules, The Block, Reno Rumble, Grand Design, The Renovators, Flip or Flop. All of these shows are designed to make me feel bad. I think that's the only reason why they exist. All of these shows remind me how pathetic I am, compared to—what seems—*everyone* else. All of these shows remind me that I am truly my father's son and I was never meant to handle a hammer.

I don't know if you've ever looked at those 'there-I-fixed-it' memes on social media, but they pretty much sum up my attempts at fixing something around the house. I'm a car guy, I can work with metal and mechanical things, but when it comes to timber, I better leave it alone.

I think we are obsessed with these Do-It-Yourself shows, because these shows can conjure up in us, a defiant self-reliance. *I* can do this. *I* can make it nice. *I* can see the fruit of my *own* labour. This is an enduring human trait. From early childhood, we tend to respond with, 'No, let *me* do it!' And this is important for our development. We *need* to do this.

But there are limits as well. Sometimes it's good to reflect on Luther's doctrine of vocation and realise that there are things that I better not touch. Leave it to the experts. It's just the way things are. I'm just going to wreck it anyway.

They say that we get our desires from one another. The neighbour has a new car; *we* want a new car. The neighbour builds a new patio; *we* want to build a new patio. But as Oscar Wilde said, 'There are only two tragedies in life: one is not getting what we want, and the other is getting it.'

Often our desires are what some psychologists call '*mis*-wants.' Once we get what we desire, we no longer want it. And the reason for this is that we often have little self-knowledge. We don't really know what we

actually need. We don't really know our place in the human family. We don't actually know our place as sinner-saints, before a merciful and gracious God. This is what I think today's parable is about.

2.0 Jesus tells a parable about ten bridesmaids, who are waiting for the bridegroom to come. When the bridegroom doesn't keep his appointment, the bridesmaids fall asleep and five of them are caught short, without oil in their lamps. So, they rush off into the dark night, desperately seeking oil for their lamps.

This doesn't work. What's worse is that on their return, the other five bridesmaids and other guests, have gone to the feast; party central. So they follow, knock on the door, but the bridegroom opens the door and says, 'I don't know you.' Hence, Jesus says, 'Stay awake!' This is a fairly standard kind of warning in our lectionary readings, as we approach the end of the Church year. We get this every year. Stay awake, be alert, don't fall asleep.

A couple of weeks ago, we commemorated Reformation Day. In the sermon that Luther preached on this text in Erfurt, a year after the Diet of Worms, Luther said that this Gospel reading has often been turned into a story about morality. Make sure you don't mess up; be on your best-behaviour. Or else.

In this kind of reading of the text, waiting for Christ, is a bit like waiting for Father Christmas. 'You better watch out, You better not cry, You better not pout, I'm telling you why, Santa Claus is coming to town.' He's making a list and checking it twice; Gonna find out, who's naughty and nice. Replace Santa Claus with Christ and there you have the Christianity of Luther's time and *also* the Christianity that is still prevalent in much of the global Church. Do-it-Yourself Christianity. Bunning's Christianity. I-can-pull-myself-up-by-my-bootstraps-Christianity, but we forget that spiritually speaking, we don't have any boots to begin with.

What if this parable is more about God's goodness, God's lavish light, rather than our works? What if this parable reminds us *not* to scamper off in the dark, to try and fix ourselves? What if this parable, reminds us to give that Do-it-Yourself Bunning's Christianity a miss and trust the good Lord, to be a kind and forgiving Lord. When we attempt to try and apply a bit of Do-it-Yourself Christianity on ourselves, rather than relying on the lavish love and lavish light of God, then we can miss the opportunity, to share in the joy of the wedding feast.

3.0 My spiritual director of some years ago, Patrick Oliver says about this parable – It's not that God says to us, 'I don't know you!' in the sense of, 'I don't recognise you and I don't want to have anything to do with you – now go away!' Rather, it's more, 'You haven't *let* me know you, because you didn't *let me meet you*, when you were lacking, when you were fearful that you didn't have enough, to merit entry into my kingdom.

'You hurried off from where you'd meet me, to try somehow to become acceptable enough, safe enough, worthy enough, good enough. What led you to think that I wouldn't have recognised you, if you'd stayed in the one spot, without the light of your lanterns? After all, *I am* the light of the world, *not* you. Let me as the bridegroom, meet you *in* your shortfall and *within* your inadequacy,' in your darkness, in your desperation.

Christ shared this parable because he knew that we would worry about not measuring up. He knew that we'd worry how we would cope, if others found out that I am lacking. This parable goes to the heart of the Reformation and Luther's understanding of God's grace. As Luther said, 'If grace depends on our cooperation, then it is no longer grace.'

We don't have confession and absolution at the beginning of each service, to make ourselves acceptable for Holy Communion. We are *never* acceptable by our own works. We are not sick in need of a doctor, so we can be healed, we are *dead*, in need of a Saviour, so that we can be resurrected. God meets us in our spot of inadequacy, in our place of lack, in our shortfall, and... *loves us*.

Let's not run away and try and fix it all up ourselves, like my elderly mother, who cleans the house, before the cleaners come. Let's stay, remain and let the Lord love us, despite our emptiness, despite our inadequacy, despite our lack.

