“Be Grateful” Matthew 25:1-13 Last Sunday 2026

Two weeks ago, we observed Remembrance day, and once again we came together to remember those who served during times of war, and sacrificed their lives. … And those too … who were left to bear the suffering. … Because war does not only affect those who fight … its consequences reach into the homes and families of all those caught up in the conflict, changing lives forever … and rarely for the better.

Our poppies, our silence, and the laying of wreaths are more than traditions. They are expressions of our gratitude, and respect for those who suffered and sacrificed so much. They also acknowledge the countless lives shattered or lost through events … far beyond their control.

The great wars of the last century are now increasingly distant from personal memory, but remembrance is not simply about those wars alone. … Today, we see the suffering caused by conflicts in the Ukraine, the Middle East, and other parts of the world too, where ordinary people have seen their homes, families and their everyday lives torn apart by war.

And we don't need to enter the politics of these conflicts to recognise the terrible suffering they cause, … or to feel compassion for the innocent people whose lives have been caught up in the relentless violence of war.

And this leaves us with a question worth thinking about this morning: how exactly do we remember the terrible cost of yesterday … how do we remain concerned about the suffering of today … without becoming frightened of tomorrow?

To understand that question, let us look back at the wars of the last century where we have one enormous advantage over the people who lived through them. We know how the story ended.

We can watch a documentary in which years are compressed into an hour or read a history book and simply turn the page to discover what happened next … but for the people living through those years, there was no next page to turn.

For example, the young men and women, and many of them were very young indeed, had left home to join their ships or regiments, them had no idea whether they would return home or not … and even if they did return home … what physical or mental scars might they carry for the rest of their lives?

And for their families too … those waving goodbye at the station … there was the constant worry of what the next letter or telegram might bring …

whether their loved ones were safe, wounded, or perhaps never able to return home at all.

Our lives today are thankfully very different from those who lived through the Great Wars, but there is one thing we have in common though: none of us know exactly what tomorrow will bring.

We naturally make plans, and most of the time those plans work out reasonably well. But occasionally, life takes an unexpected turn … perhaps an illness, a worry about someone we love, or news that changes everything … and suddenly … we find ourselves facing a situation where we simply don't know what to do ....

And this is where today’s Gospel reading begins to speak to us, because Jesus tells us about ten bridesmaids waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom. The bridesmaids knew he was coming … but what they didn't know … was how long they would be kept waiting. … Five were wise and five were foolish, although at first there was little outward difference between them. All ten had their lamps, and all ten were waiting … but the five wise bridesmaids had brought extra oil, while the foolish ones had not … and when the bridegroom was delayed, all ten eventually became drowsy and fell asleep, not just the foolish five.

And there is something in that little detail which is very easy to miss … because at the end of the parable Jesus says, “Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” … And yet, even the five whom Jesus called wise had fallen asleep.

So whatever Jesus meant by telling us to keeping awake, he cannot simply mean that we should spend our lives permanently on alert, never relaxing, and always worrying about what might happen next. … After all, the five wise bridesmaids had no more an idea of when the bridegroom would arrive, than the five foolish ones. …

The difference was that the 5 wise had brought enough oil to see them through, allowing him to be late. … So being prepared therefore, is not the same as being constantly on guard, just as being ready is not the same as being anxious.

And that is a distinction worth remembering in our own lives … because although we may not be standing with lamps waiting for a bridegroom, we

certainly know what it is to worry about things, over which we have very little control.

Today we can hear about events almost anywhere in the world, within moments of them happening … and while that knowledge is valuable, it also means that troubling news can find its way into our homes very quickly … and when it does, our imaginations can take over … and we begin to picture what might happen next … and then what might happen after that … until we find ourselves living through events in our minds which have not yet happened, and maybe never will.

However, back to the five wise bridesmaids, they had made all the preparations they reasonably could. So, they rested while they waited, ready for the bridegroom whenever he arrived. They were prepared for the unexpected, without living in fear of it.

Of course, we must ask what Jesus wants us to be prepared for … because this is not a story about military readiness. … He begins, “The kingdom of heaven will be like this,” and he is speaking about our relationship with God, and how we prepare ourselves for a future which we can neither predict nor control.

Christianity has never promised that believing in God will protect us from difficulty or danger … although some would have us believe otherwise … but we only must think of those who went to war. … Many of them had a strong Christian faith … yet some never returned, while others came home carrying physical or emotional scars which stayed with them for the rest of their lives. … So, faith does not give us control over tomorrow … but it can give us the strength to face whatever tomorrow may bring.

And that strength becomes particularly important when life doesn't turn out as we had hoped … because when things start to go wrong … what is it exactly that keeps us going?

And it's so easy to say, “Trust in the Lord.” But what does that mean when everything is going wrong … when prayers go unanswered … and the wolf is at the door?

It's easy enough to speak about trusting God when life is going well … but trusting Him when everything seems to be going wrong is another matter entirely. After all, we believe in a living God whom we cannot see, hear, smell

or touch … yet we believe He is there … that He is present … and that He is watching over us.

The question, then, is how do we learn to turn that belief into trust? That, sadly, is a much bigger question than we could hope to answer this morning. But we can make a beginning by looking at something we all experience, although … we may not always recognise its importance … and that is something called gratitude.

How often have we looked back on a period of our lives and said, those were some of the best years we ever had? … And yet, if we think about it, those years weren't always easy … because during those years, we still had our worries, our difficulties and our disappointments … just as we do today, but somehow, looking back, we tend to remember the happier moments … and forget just how much some of those difficulties troubled us at the time. …

And isn't it a pity that we so often recognise the good times long after they have passed … when we might have appreciated them so much more, while we were living through them?

And that is really what I mean by gratitude today … learning to recognise and appreciate the good things in our lives while we still have them … because when something is worrying us, it can become almost impossible to think about anything else. … “And yet, even during those difficult times, we may still have much to be grateful for.”

And as Christians, we can take that gratitude a little further … by consciously thanking God for the good things in our lives, including the little things we so often take for granted. And as we begin to recognise those little gifts we so easily overlook, and remember where they came from, we may also begin to realise just how much we must thank God for.

Peace … freedom … friends and family … and the ordinary pleasures of everyday life … things, whose true value we recognise only when we look back, or sadly, when we lose them. … As the Big Yellow Taxi song reminds us, “You don't know what you've got till it's gone.”

So, when Jesus tells us to keep awake, we can understand those words in a slightly different way. Not as a warning to spend our lives anxiously watching for trouble … but as a reminder to keep our eyes open to the good things that are already part of our lives … and to remember to thank God for them.

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We cannot know what tomorrow will bring, and we cannot prevent every difficulty that may come our way. But we can learn to appreciate the blessings we have today; … remember with gratitude those who have helped us along the way; and gradually develop a stronger faith in the God who will be with us whatever tomorrow may bring.

So, in short - be prepared for tomorrow, but don't forget to be grateful for today. Amen