



A Sermon for Remembrance Sunday 2020

** Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16 * Psalm 70 * 1 Thessalonians 4:13 to end * Matthew 25:1-13 **

Nations around the world spend an enormous amount of money to defend their nation. The budget last year for UK defence was £50.3 billion. The US spends the equivalent of around £500 billion). This is spent on everything that is necessary to prepare in case the military is required to provide protection for the country, either at home or abroad. The preparations take many forms – the cost of personnel, development of new equipment and the cost of that equipment, training, housing and more. If any group of people demonstrates the ability to make solid preparations, it is surely the military.

But preparation for deployment is about more than practical considerations. Emotional and spiritual preparations are also important, and each service includes within its ranks chaplains, who provide the kind of support that serving personnel and their families need. Chaplains have an important role to help people to prepare as much as possible, both spiritually and emotionally.

Today's parable is a story of the prepared and the unprepared.

The necessary preparations for the wedding involve thinking things through to the end and considering all the possibilities. It isn't that the foolish bridesmaids have no oil at all. They have oil in their lamps and presumably think it will be enough to last until the bridegroom arrives. But sadly he is delayed, something they hadn't considered. The result is that they are, literally, left in the dark. By the time they have sorted out the necessary oil, everything, and everyone, has moved on, and they are left behind. The celebration they are supposed to be attending goes on without them.

On the other hand, the wise bridesmaids have considered every possibility. They realise that things might not happen as they expect and they are prepared. They join the party as planned.

The general interpretation of this parable is that it is a warning to stay prepared and focused in anticipation of the Lord's return. By the time that Matthew's Gospel was written, it was clear that Jesus' promise to return was not to be fulfilled immediately. Today's reading from 1 Thessalonians is Paul's reassurance that those who have died during this delay will not miss out on the kingdom of God at the end times.

Unlike military preparations, there is very little we can do in a practical sense to be ready for Christ's return. But, like military personnel and their families, we can make mental and spiritual preparations for the promised end and for whatever it is that God has planned for us on our journey through life.

Like the bridesmaids, and the military personnel and their families, we do not know the day or the hour that Our Lord will return. We can only remain prepared, and those preparations are both a challenge and a joy, as God leads us to new heights of our understanding and relationship with him.

Rev. Stuart G. Hill (BTh Oxon.)
Associate Priest, Jarrow and Simonside

Photo: Gary Pescod Photography