Remembrance Sunday 8th November 2026
Preached by The Rev Jae Chandler

Reading: Matthew 25:1-13 New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition
"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten young women took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those young women got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' 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. Later the other young women came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

SERMON
It may seem rather strange on Remembrance Sunday to have this odd little story about a group of bridesmaids getting their lamps ready for a wedding banquet. What on earth has that got to do with Remembrance Sunday, you may well ask. Of course, we are looking at this reading through the lens of the culture and the times that we live in now. For those who heard Jesus telling the story in his day, they would have had a bit of a different perspective. They would've known that there were different layers of *symbolic* meaning in the story. So, to understand the story and apply to our lives today, we need to ask the question: "What would it have meant to Jesus and his listeners back then?"

Oil in Jesus' time could've meant lots of things. But there are three meanings which are relevant to us today on Remembrance Sunday.

- Repentance
- Anointing
- Light

Let's look at each one in turn....

First of all, **Repentance** - what does repentance mean? We often think of repentance as saying sorry for something wrong that we've done and - if we're a person of faith - asking God for forgiveness. But there a bit more to repentance than that. Repentance is about what is going on *inside* us - it's about turning our hearts and minds and actions away from what is wrong and towards what is *right* – towards God and God's ways. God's ways are ways of peace. Jesus Christ was called the Prince of Peace.

And so, the symbolism of oil as repentance has a very powerful meaning for us today when we reflect on our collective human 'wrongs' in relation to war, violence and the great harms done to each other and towards God's creation. In this moment, on this day, we have the opportunity to repent – to turn hearts and minds again - away from these devastating wrongs and towards what is right - towards God's ways of peace and reconciliation.

The second symbolism of oil is **anointing**. Back in Bible times, oil was used to anoint priests and kings for the holy work they were set aside to do. In fact – it wasn't just in bible times – we still anoint people these days in church in special services where a person may be dedicated to God for a special purpose – for example at baptisms, confirmations, when someone is ordained – and also at a Coronation of a King or Queen.

Anointing is like a symbolic declaration that a person is loved, chosen and blessed to be appointed by God for holy and godly work. The stickiness of the oil is meant to represent the 'sticking' or lasting nature of the blessing conferred on the person.

The final symbolism of oil – the one which connects most obviously with Jesus' story about the bridesmaids - is of course **light.** Those lamps that the bridesmaids had weren't like bedside lamps that you can turn on with a switch in a plug socket - they would have been *oil* lamps. In the story, of course, Jesus refers to physical lamps and their light - but it has a spiritual meaning too. Jesus called himself "The light of the world", saying whoever follows him will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." And at the beginning John's gospel, Jesus is referred to as: "The light [that] shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it."

Light is a powerful symbol - not just within the Christian tradition but across lots of different faiths and cultures.

This story of the bridesmaids is a reminder that we are called to walk in the *spiritual* light – AND – that like those bridesmaids we are to carefully nurture that light within us so that we are always ready to take it into the world, to bring light into the darkness so that the darkness does not overtake things.
In this service of Remembrance today, we of course call to mind how the darkness of war and violence has impacted our world so terribly. But we can also move forward into the future with hope – remembering these three special meanings of the oil:

- Like the oil of **repentance** – we can turn our ways towards God's ways of peace

- Like the oil of **anointing** - we can know ourselves to be loved and chosen and we can offer ourselves to the holy work of peace-making and reconciliation in the world

and finally

- Like the oil of **light** - we can be those who choose to walk in the light - choosing to follow Jesus, the light of the world, so that we and others need never to endure living in darkness.

A prayer
Jesus, Prince of peace,
bring your peace into our disordered world.
Even though we live in darkened days,
let us always seek to follow you, the Light of the World.
Help us to bring that light into our communities
and to join in your holy work of being peace-makers.
In Jesus name we pray,
Amen.