SERMON AT GELORUP: 10/11/2002: AND THE DIOCESE OF BUNBURY 8/11/2027: GEOFF CHADWICK: PENTECOST 25

(OS 32) MTT 25:1-13: "GIVE ME OIL IN MY LAMP"

Some years ago, when I visited the Anglican Church in Japan (or the Holy Catholic Church as it is called there), I found myself singing a popular chorus with a group of young adults. It went like this:

> Give me oil in my (r)amp keep me b(a)rning
> Give me oil in my (r)amp I p(l)ay
> Give me oil in my (r)amp keep me b(a)rning
> Keep me b(a)rning to the b(l)eak of day....

This song, "Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning" is of course, the song of the wise and foolish bridesmaids (or virgins depending on your translation); and my singing it with my Japanese friends reflected something of the point that parable is trying to make. Although we can interpret the parable in terms of waiting for Jesus' second coming, it is more about keeping our precious faith alive. This is how we sang the song. In a country where only 1-2% are Christians and where Sunday is a workday — "give me oil in my lamp" was of great significance. We sang that our faith might not be extinguished.

Bill Loader, one time professor of NT studies at Murdoch University puts it like this:

> "[The parable] is not about 2000 years of trying to whip up expectations that Jesus just might come very soon. It is about sustaining the life of faith. It is another version of Matthew's theme of elitism. Having had lamps in hand which burned well once is no guarantee they will burn in the future. Having the status of being a Christian, even being a light bearer, means nothing if it is not a continuing part of our being... Matthew is interested in enabling people to live in a relationship with God which has continuing significance and continuing life." (Loader, W., Nov 2002, www.staff.murdoch.edu.auAoader/MtPentecost25.htm)

Bill loader's comments help to earth the parable into the "here and now". His comments make us very aware of just how precarious our own supply of oil can be. The oil of our faith is easily degreased. Our lives can become so busy that we squeeze out God — not only that — we squeeze out the space we need to be ourselves — to be the self, God is intending us to be.

We can be degreased by those who do not share our faith and question the wisdom of standing out in the dark with a flicker of light waiting for the God who seems never to come...

We can be degreased by those who continue to ask for our oil — those who blunder into the dark places of life without trimming their lamps — those who would exhaust us if we would let them.

We can be degreased by our own tardiness. When life seems to be stumbling from one crisis to the next — where circumstances overwhelm us and we've failed to stock up on the oil we need to lubricate our lives...

Yes. It is possible for our lamps to go out. It is possible for our faith to grow dim; to be stumbling in the dark when once we were bearers of the light. Yes, we can run out of oil...

BUT

All is not lost!

Despite the harshness of the Parable, I do believe faith can be re-kindled. I do believe that our empty oil stock can be replenished. I do believe in a God who gives us all that

we need to get through the business of living our daily lives. Our foolishness may lead us into darkness, but God's generosity may rekindle the light of life within us.

It was Saint Irenaeus (Ad 130-200) who said: "The Glory of God is [humanity] fully alive."

(In Against Heresies, Quoted in The Pan Dictionary of Religious Quotations, 1991 , p206.)

So let our lamps shine!

Give me oil in my (r)amp keep me b(a)rning
Give me oil in my (r)amp I p(l)ay
Give me oil in my (r)amp keep me b(a)rning
Keep me b(a)rning to the b(l)eak of day….

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.