

SERMON AT GELORUP: GEOFF CHADWICK: 8/11/2020

OS 32 SUNDAY BETWEEN 6 AND 12 NOVEMBER

MTT 25:1-13: EVERYONE LOVES A WEDDING STORY

Everyone loves a wedding story – especially when something has gone wrong. Here are a few of my personal favourites:

- 1) In York (WA): the bride was an Hour late because some well-wishing friends turned up at her house just as she was about to leave Perth.
- 2) In Brunswick: another delay, as a bridesmaid managed to put her high heel through her dress whilst getting out of the car. Fortunately, there was a wise companion with her who just happened to have needle and thread in her handbag. It makes me wonder – what do women keep in their handbags?
- 3) In Applecross: the bride's father who rang me 10 min before the wedding preparation interview with the couple. He needed to correct the fiancé's name he had given me during a previous phone call. "I'm having trouble keeping up with the boyfriends' names" he said. "She's had so many of them."
- 4) In the Far-East: there are ten bridesmaids who are more interested in attending to the Bridegroom than the Bride. The bridegroom is late, probably after a rollicking buck's night. On top of this, the Bride did not choose her maidens well. Five of the ten are ditsy, whilst the other five, (possibly chosen by her mother) are very practical but not very generous. Strangely they keep lamp-oil in their hand bags. I wonder again, – who knows what might be in a woman's hand-bag!

This wedding has got a few other problems as well. The Bride, hardly cracks a mention – except in the memory of a few who know the story. No only that, the Bridegroom has amnesia! After going to the shops, the Bridesmaids are locked out of the wedding banquet. When they tried to get in the Bridegroom he says he doesn't know them! By the way,

didn't anyone at the banquet notice that half the bridesmaids were missing?

What a disaster!

Oh yes! Everyone loves a wedding story- even Jesus – the master story teller!

So what's this story about?

There are several interpretations:

- 1) As the idea of "Messiah as Bridegroom" is unknown at the time of Jesus, "the delay" refers to the impending disaster to befall the nation.
- 2) Some see it as a warning to the ditsy church members that they must not lose faith in the face of the Messiah's delayed return.
- 3) Some see it as an allegory of the Messianic story – where those Jews who had not acknowledged Jesus the Messiah are locked out of the heavenly banquet.
- 4) As a warning to present church members to "be awake" in the faith.

To a certain extent, all of these seem possible, but I'm drawn to the idea of "ditsy" and wise church members.

In scripture the faithful community is often described as a bride, but unusually, in this story, the focus is on the bridesmaids. In fact, many of the early manuscripts don't make any reference to the bride thus highlighting the role of the Bridesmaids. But who are these bridesmaids?

Well let's consider them to be church members *as individuals*.

Whilst *the bride* may represent the faith community as a whole, I suggest that *the Bridesmaids* represent members as individuals.

Yes we are all part of a greater whole, but as individuals we can choose to act foolishly or wisely. Our job is to attend to the bride but *at the same* time as being alert to the arrival of the Bridegroom. This is a two-way focus, *inwardly* to the Bride and *outwardly* to the Bridegroom. Whilst I don't want to push the allegory too far, there may be an element of truth here.

As individuals we've all known times when we've got the inward-outward balance wrong. We've all experienced times when we have been totally absorbed with matters of the church, and neglected those on our fringes. On the other hand, we've all known times when we been so involved in the

fringes that we've neglected the needs of the collective whole. This is what "ditsy" Bridesmaids do. They get absorbed by one directional thinking. Wise Bridesmaids, on the other hand, are prepared for both directions. They have spare "oil to burn" in any circumstance.

I learnt this lesson early on in my ordained ministry. Freshly ordained I was sent to be the Priest of a Northern Wheatbelt Parish. Newly arrived, I was faced with a dilemma (for me at the time). A much-loved farmer of the district died, and I was asked to officiate at his funeral. Unfortunately, the date clashed with, what I thought at the time, was a very important meeting with the Bishop and my colleagues. Caught in the middle, I decide to speak to my very wise warden. I remember his reply clearly: "Well the decision is yours, but perhaps you should base it on who is in the most need."

I chose the funeral, and from that moment was made welcome by many in the local farming community. (Although, I must say not all, because communities are complex!).

Maybe I was a wise Bridesmaid after all – I had the wisdom to seek the advice of a Bridesmaid wiser than myself! Caught between the collective of the church and the needs of an individual, in this instance I correctly chose the individual.

So how's your "oil supply" at the moment? We can all get a bit exhausted if we live busy lives. On the other hand, we can sometimes have "oil to burn"!

Have we got the balance right?

What ever the case, let's not be ditsy. Let us avoid the foolishness of total self-absorption, and the similar foolishness of total-subservience. Let's be wise Bridesmaids, knowing when to attend to the Bride, and when to attend to the Bridegroom!

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.