

- I think all of us have had some experience of what it means to wait.
- Whether we are waiting for something we are looking forward to or something that we are dreading, all of us have had some experience of being in that place of expectation when we know something is going to happen but it has not happened yet.

- And in our experience of waiting the question often arises:
 - what do we do while we we wait?
 - what can we do while we wait?

- And this is the question that is being posed in our gospel reading this morning.

- Our gospel reading comes from the beginning of Matthew chapter 25, but a wee while back, at the beginning of chapter 24, we hear how Jesus is coming out of the temple in Jerusalem and his disciples are marvelling at the size of the temple and its buildings and Jesus says to them,
 - “You see all these buildings? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down”.
- And, clearly, this statement gets the disciples thinking because later on they come to Jesus and ask him,
 - “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

- They have taken Jesus’ words as a reference to that big moment in time when the Messiah will come and everything will be made new, and all will be put to rights, and God will be “all in all”, and Israel will take its rightful place in glory.

- That seems like something the disciples would be keen to know and something that we ourselves might also want to know.
 - It would be good to know when everything is going to be put to right.
- It’s easier to to keep on going when you have an end in sight.
 - Its quite nice at the end of a marathon to know that you only have 1 kilometre left to go.
 - You’re nearly there!

- But actually, in the gospels, Jesus avoids giving any precise answer to this question.

- In Matthew’s gospel, he says,

- “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son,^{*} but only the Father”
- All Jesus does when asked about this is to speak of the suddenness with which this moment will come:
 - It will be like a flash of lightning suddenly lighting up the sky.
 - It will be like a thief in the night coming at an unexpected hour.
- And then he goes on to tell parables that address this question of what to do in the meantime,
 - what to do while we are waiting,
 - what it mean for us to be prepared for Christ’s coming.
- And that’s what this morning’s parable is all about.
 - Bridesmaids who can keep their lamps burning and bridesmaids who can’t.
- The Bridesmaids who can keep their lamps burning get to see what they have been waiting for while those who can’t don’t.
- And while that might sound kind of ominous and forbidding, I think this parable is much more interesting and helpful as a piece of practical wisdom.
- What do you do when you are waiting for someone or something?
- What do you do to keep your mind and body occupied, distracted even?
 - You get on with doing the things that you need to do!
- And actually that is exactly what Jesus is telling his disciples, what Jesus is telling us, to do also.
 - Keep busy.
 - Do the things that you are supposed to be doing.
 - That’s it.
- I saw a t-shirt once that had as its slogan,
 - “Jesus is coming. Look busy”
- Now, of course, actually being busy is a bit more than just looking busy and I’m not suggesting that we should be involved in endless frenetic activity just for the sake of being busy.
- But we have been given a job to do.
- We have been given a particular work to do to keep us busy.

- And what do you do when you've been given a job?
 - You keep doing that job until it is done, or until, for whatever reason, you can do it no more, or until it has been taken off your hands.

- The bridesmaids job was to keep the lamps burning to greet the bridegroom and some of them were able to do that and some weren't but those who did got to see what they were waiting for.

- And we too have been given a job:
 - to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and love our neighbour as ourselves,
 - or, in the words of the prophet Micah, to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God,
 - or, in the words of Jesus again, to love one another as I have loved you.

- And that is not going to stop being our job in the foreseeable future so that is what we do in the meantime.
- That is what we do as we wait for Jesus to come again.

- And, you know, the thing about all of that is that when we do our job,
 - when we love one another,
 - when we gather together in worship and prayer,
 - when we seek to support one another and to serve the community,
 - then we, actually experience Jesus' presence among us.
- When we do the job that has been given to us we receive the very thing that we have been waiting for

- So, for us here at All Saints, we will keep gathering together in worship and prayer.
- We will continue to support one another with time and companionship and a meal when we might need it.
- We will keep supporting the work of Grief and Loss Support Services and the Selwyn Centre for the Young at Heart.
- We will keep on contributing to the Food bank with our time and our money and our grocery shopping.
- We will keep on offering Christmas Lunches on Jesus and kettles and toasters to Women's Refuge and blankets and pyjamas to the Anglican Trust for Women and Children.

- And we will keep on doing that until the work of love and compassion and mercy and justice is done, or we can do it no longer, or until that work has been taken off our hands.
- And in that work that we do while we wait we will see Jesus again and again and again.
- Because when we do the job that has been given to us we receive the very thing for which we have been waiting.