

*Jesus said, "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids 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 bridesmaids 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 bridesmaids 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."*

Matthew 25:1-13

Most of the time, this passage is linked with what we call the Second Coming; the return of Jesus at the transition from this age into the new age where heaven and earth are one. Indeed, if we look at where this passage comes in Matthew's gospel, we will find that it is placed near the very end of Jesus' earthly life, in that final week in Jerusalem where most of his conversations touch on His coming death and resurrection.

And as much as Jesus *is* talking about his return, he is also really talking about the interval between that day and this. And while his first followers believed that that return might take place very quickly, in their own lifetimes even, we know that the interval between the Ascension and the return has been and possibly will be a long wait.

For many people, waiting for Jesus is not so dissimilar to how kids wait for Christmas, focused intently on what that day will bring *for them*. The waiting becomes an exercise focused almost wholly on ourselves and our wishes. What Jesus is asking of us though is something more akin to how parents experience Christmas. It's about ensuring that we are preparing to ensure a good result for others.

The time between now and the return of Jesus, could be short, or perhaps it could be another two millennia. We truly don't know, and despite the best efforts of some impatient souls, it cannot be known. So how do we best take advantage of this time?

By preparing ourselves, of course, but how do we do that? First by modelling our lives on the life of Jesus, and second by following Jesus' command to love God and our neighbors with our whole selves. And the way we love our neighbor is to ensure their basic needs are met but also to share with them the good news of the Gospel and invite

them into the community of God's people and to continue to support them once they are in the community.

The point of the parable here is that the time to prepare should not be wasted.

Answering the call of Christ to make love a manifest force in the world is not something that can be put for a later date. We need to confront the needs of our neighbors for both food and the Word now, not when we feel like we're ready, but now, even if imperfectly.