

Are You Ready While You Are Waiting?

While Derek and I were away last weekend it was nice to have the time to chat together. As we sat looking out over the Harbour, Derek asked me a very profound question, Do you keep worrying about things? and my answer was, well……sometimes I don't, other times, I take the issue right back and try and sort it out myself. It's an absolute blessing when we are able to let things go, because no amount of worry, thinking, or going over and over a situation in our head will bring a resolution.
We all have stuff going on in our families that is concerning and causes us to worry, things that can be really stressful, and this possibly prompted the question from Derek.

My daughter sufferers with anxiety for time to time, usually she manages quite well, however the last few weeks she has been dealing with a difficult staff member at work, (she is in a management role), also she had a minor car accident, which was more inconvenient than anything else, but because her side mirror was damaged she wasn't able to drive the car, and the insurance company was a bit slow getting organised.
So, she has been on the phone having a rant, more than usual.

So, how can we develop strategies that will free us from the burden of worry. It's not easy, especially when it involves our adult children or any family member or close friend.
Jesus tells us over and over not to worry, there are so many verses that remind us to hand things over to him, to leave our concerns at the foot of the cross, however I, we, often then take our worries back and just worry on.

Jesus explicitly commands his followers not to worry (or not to be anxious) multiple times within a single primary teaching in the New Testament; the Sermon on the Mount.
In Matthew 6:25, Jesus says "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body or what you will wear."

Then again in Matthew 6:31, "So, do not worry, saying what shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? What shall we wear?" And also in Matthew 6:34 "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself".

Handing over to Jesus can be a bit like throwing out our bags of rubbish and then collecting them up again and keeping them, as Michael Birch mentioned at Dinner Church a few weeks ago.
Or the Kit Kat add on TV, take a break, the young guy leaves the office for a break and all of his paperwork clings to him and follows him outside; it would be good if it was that easy, just break a Kit Kat bar and all our worries fall away.

Even though it sounds impossible, we can achieve peace in our hearts and minds as we grow in our faith and really learn to trust and obey Jesus. I think the secret is being prepared.
I have had conversations with several members of our congregation, who are able to leave their issue with Jesus, and these have been serious issues. I find this extremely encouraging, what a wonderful example to our church community and an amazing testament to their faith in Jesus.

So back to being prepared. In our Gospel reading this morning we heard the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids.

The interpretation can be a little difficult as it centres around the culture of Jesus' day regarding the significance of the ten bridesmaids and their lanterns. The wedding protocol of the time would suggest that unmarried young women would wait with the bride at her family's house for the arrival of the bridegroom. When he appears they go out to meet him with blazing torches and escort the couple back to his house where the marriage feast has been prepared and the guests have been waiting for the couple's festal entry.

We don't know why the bridegroom is so late, maybe it is due to some other custom unknown to us or maybe he is having a few drinks with his mates.
Anyway, once the bridesmaids are made aware of the bridegroom's arrival the girls go into a spin and gather themselves together, five of course don't have enough oil for their lamps, so they are unable to fulfil their welcoming roles. Because the girls have to go and buy oil for their torches they are not there for the crucial moment.
When they make their belated way to the feast they find the door shut in their faces, and the bridegroom, angry at their failure and refusing to recognise them.

Jesus probably told the parable to address, as so often, the tension between the future state of the kingdom, symbolised by the wedding banquet, and the need to make preparation now for it's coming. Since the precise time of this realisation is not certain, how foolish to be found unprepared and so in a situation that might lead to missing out on it.

The parable vividly communicates the sense of "Can you imagine what those five women must have felt, their panic at realising they had no oil, their anguish and shame on arriving back too late and finding the doors barred in their faces and harsh words from the groom.
Would you like to be in that situation regarding the kingdom? I think not."

The parable also addresses life in the Church as it awaits the return of the Lord, clearly to be identified with the bridegroom for whom the young women keep watch. The detail that five of the women are wise and five are foolish reflects the mixed nature of the church.
People exist side by side; presently they are not at all distinguishable from one another but the Bridegroom's arrival as judge will show the difference between them.

The supply of oil that the five young women were sensible enough to bring would be the "surpassing righteousness" commended in the gospel. The plaintiff cry of the five foolish bridesmaids, "Lord, Lord open to us", represents the kind of believer who cries out, "Lord, Lord," but has no good work to accompany this confession of faith.

The wise may sleep (in death) before the coming of the Lord, but when he does come, they will go out to meet him, their torches brightly ablaze because of the "good oil", (good works), they have in sufficient measure.

The final warning about "staying awake" because neither the day nor the hour is known really means "be prepared" rather than stay awake. It's not falling asleep that is questioned here, all ten bridesmaids, both the wise and foolish fall asleep, that's not the problem.

The difference between them is that the wise have made sure to have sufficient oil to kindle their torches when they are roused, while the foolish have neglected this precaution. Those who have always with them the "oil" required for salvation can "sleep" without anxiety about being caught short by the sudden arrival of their Lord.

So, where do we stand in all of this explanation? Are we prepared, prepared for whatever may befall us. This preparation, this reliance, trust and obedience develops in us a very strong and powerful relationship with our Lord and this enables us to hand over our worries and know that whatever happens, Jesus will do the very best for us, maybe not exactly what we want, but what we need.

Also one of the most important aspects of our faith, is that of community, which allows us to share with our Christian brothers and sisters, to support each other along our journey, through both joyful and difficult times.

Therefore we can find a sense of peace and calm in any situation, draw close to God and he will draw close to you, I think that comes from James.
Our two enemies on this earth are fear (anxiety) and guilt, together we continually need to work against these two evils, in Jesus' name.

Amen.