

## Sermon 8 November 2020 P.U.S.H.

### Matthew 25:1-13

The scene as depicted by Jesus in this Gospel passage is a scene which could have happened at any time in a Palestinian village and which could still happen today.

A wedding was a great occasion. The whole village turned out to accompany the couple to their new home, and they went by the longest possible route, in order that they might receive the good wishes of as many people as possible.

The point of this story lies in a Jewish custom which is very different from anything we know. When a couple married, they did not go away for a honeymoon; they stayed at home. For a week they kept open house. They were treated like royalty. It was their chosen friends that were invited to take part in these festivities.

Now in terms of the wedding itself, this could happen at any time, and one of the great things to do at a middle-class wedding, if you could, was to catch the bridal party napping. So the bridegroom comes unexpectedly, and sometimes late at night. He is required to send a man along the street to shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming!' But that might happen at any time, so the bridal party have to be ready to go out into the street and meet him.

It must also be remembered that no one is allowed on the streets after dark without a lamp, and also that, once the bridegroom has arrived, and the door has been shut, late-comers to the ceremony are not admitted. And so the foolish bridesmaids who were not prepared missed out.

Like so many of Jesus's parables, this one has an immediate and a local meaning, and also a wider and universal meaning. In its immediate context, it was directed at the Jews. They were the chosen people; their whole history should have been a preparation for the coming of the Son of God; they ought to have been prepared for him when he came. Instead they were quite unprepared, and so they missed out.

Then there is the universal meaning for us all. We need to prepare ourselves for a relationship with the Son of God. Building a relationship with Jesus is like building anything significant. It is hard work. If you are not prepared to put in the hard yards, it is simply not going to happen.

So if I wanted to build a relationship with God, how would I go about it? Well, there are a few things I could do, but there is one thing especially I would do, and to illustrate that, let me tell you a story.

A man was sleeping one night in his cabin when suddenly his room was filled with light, and God appeared. The Lord told the man he had work for him to do, and showed him a large

boulder in front of his cabin. The Lord explained that the man was to push against the boulder with all his might. So this is what the man did, day after day.

For months he toiled each day, his shoulders set squarely against the massive boulder, pushing with all his might. Each night the man returned to his cabin exhausted, his body aching from all the pushing. The boulder, however, never budged and the man was getting quite discouraged.

In the end, the man prayed to God, 'Lord', he said, 'I have laboured hard and long in your service, putting all my strength into what you have asked me to do. Yet, after all this time, I have not managed to move the boulder one millimetre. What is wrong? Why am I failing?'

The Lord replied, 'My friend, when I asked you to serve me and you accepted, I told you that your task was to push against the boulder with all your strength, which you have done. Never once did I mention to you that I expected you to move it. Your task was to push. And now you come to me thinking you have failed. But look at yourself. Your arms and back are strong and muscled. Your legs have become massive. You are a different person.'

'True, you haven't moved the boulder, but your call was to be obedient and to have faith in what I asked you to do. You have done that. Now, I will move the boulder for you.'

This story is about P.U.S.H. Look at the front of your service sheet. (P.U.S.H.) What does this stand for? Pray Until Something Happens. Whether it is a relationship with God, or whether it is something significant we want to achieve in life, or just dealing with life's challenges, pray, pray, pray, or should I say, PUSH, PUSH, PUSH.

I refer to our reading from Ephesians, '*Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere.*' There is also the verse from that wonderful passage in Luke – '*And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for.*' Luke 11:9.

One assumes that because we are gathered here this morning, we are quite interested in a meaningful and lasting relationship with God and with Jesus. So that means we have to work at it, because it is not going to just happen on its own accord. We need to do the groundwork. One way of doing that, and a very good way, is through prayer.