SCRIPTURE STUDY, SERMON & WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

BREAKING OPEN
Scripture Study



What are we keeping the Light for?

PENTECOST 24A

8th November, 2026

Dennis Webster

Revised Common Lectionary Related

Amos 5.18-24

Psalm 70

1 Thessalonians 4.9-18

Matthew 25.1-13



Tatungalung Totem

This is produced on GunaiKurnai Country and our respects are paid to the First Nations people everywhere.

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

O God, our refuge and strength, who art the author of all godliness: Be ready, we beseech thee, to hear the devout prayers of thy Church: and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually: through Jesus Christ our Lord.

IMMERSION IN LIVING WATER

Ezekiel 47:9, 12



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INTRODUCTION

Quite a few years ago, I attended a baptism for my friend's daughter, Prudence. The officiating priest who highlighted the importance of prudence—defined not just as wisdom, but the ability to discern and act well in specific situations. This theme connects with the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids, where prudence reflects readiness and faithfulness.

While the wise act with foresight, the foolish lack preparation. Jesus instructs his disciples to be wise as serpents, emphasizing that wisdom involves readiness, not cleverness. Amos warns against empty rituals, stressing that true worship is manifested through justice and mercy.

Our "Rule of Life" guides our actions, shaping how we embody our faith. The prudent bridesmaids, though initially asleep, were prepared for the bridegroom's arrival. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians encourages being ready for the unexpected. Prudence involves providing what is necessary for active lives of love and joy in the Lord.

Matthew's portrayal of the bridesmaids prompts reflection on whether our choices embody Kingdom values. The narrative emphasizes readiness through action: feeding the hungry, offering hospitality, and embodying compassion. Ultimately, are our lives prepared to welcome the Anointed One, reflecting light through justice, mercy, and love?

Prayer

May we cultivate a faith that goes beyond mere ritual and worship, letting our lives be marked by justice and mercy as Amos and the sermon remind us.

May we embrace phronimos—the wisdom that acts, discerns, and makes faithful choices in the moment rather than relying on last-minute preparation.

May our daily lives and long-term commitments reflect the steady oil of readiness, allowing us to wait actively with love and joy.

May we embody Christ's light through concrete acts of compassion, hospitality, and service to those in need, keeping our lamps burning for the Anointed One.

What Are We Keeping the Light for?
Prudence is more than being ready to wait —it is being ready to love.

A few years ago, I went to North Albury as a godparent for my friend's first child (a daughter). The priest that day preached on the Gospel for the day. It was concerning Zacchaeus, and the priest sang the old children's song about climbing the tree to see, complete with actions. He spoke to the parents who had just welcomed Prudence into their family. He said it was time they found a little prudence in their lives.

Prudence. That is what Jesus wants in today's Gospel. But what does prudence have to do with the five young women who wait in the night?

Modern translations miss the word's heart. Prudence sounds old, even unfamiliar to Matthew's Gospel, but it chooses it carefully. Not 'sophist' — wisdom of insight — but phronimos: wisdom that acts, discerns, chooses well in the moment.

The ones we call 'wise' in today's Sermon are those who know how to behave in the situation they find themselves in. The 'moros' (from which we get the word moron) are the fools, senseless and totally not far-sighted at all. And of course, with 'Parthenon' translated as virgins rather than young women, if you grew up with the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, then you'd be surprised to hear that perhaps a more accurate title might have been the Parable of the Prudent and Moronic Bridesmaids!

When a word is used a few times deliberately, it's worth thinking about why. The first time round, a sensible man builds his house on rock rather than sand. As an aside, I was told the story of how this Church was built originally.

Albert Ah Yee's daughters said his engineer brother told him the Church roof wasn't shaped correctly and wouldn't support the light tower. People laughed at him, but he later felt vindicated when the roof needed replacing. A prudent man — and a lesson in knowing and doing things differently too. As we say today: IYKYK (if you know, you know)!

The serpent is often seen as evil. Jesus tells his disciples to be wise as serpents, innocent as doves. The image is disturbing. Wisdom isn't what

we expect.

And just before the story of the prudent bridesmaids, we have a servant who is prudent and faithful — always bringing food at the right time. Every time phornimos is used, it means the same thing. Prudence is faithfulness in service and responsibility according to circumstances. Readiness isn't something you spring into; it's something you keep up over the long term; it's not something that comes to you when the moment is right.

Jesus doesn't call us to cleverness but wisdom that acts. To hear and do. Amos speaks to people who know the words of worship but don't live justice. Ritual without mercy is empty. The journey with God isn't measured by ceremonies but by justice, mercy and walking with the Shepherd.

We all have a Rule of Life (informal or formal); it defines who we are and how we live. Every year clergy renew their commitment to the bishop — not only as a vow but as a way of life. Some join communities as professed members or associates; others as tertiaries (modern monks) with an adopted Rule. Jesus says, "You will know them by their fruit." They do what they profess, not as a duty to observe but as a way of life.

The sensible bridesmaids haven't passed some idealistic, mystical test of being 'prepared.' They have provisioned for the journey and contingencies beyond their control. They are awake. But contrary to what is usually said about the story, both sensible and foolish bridesmaids were asleep when the bridegroom came. It just so happened that five were ready when he arrived. The other five weren't because they were ignorant.

So we come to Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, where he tells them to be ready. The time will come (though not when we think it will), and we can't do anything about it. First, the dead will rise; then, as Paul says, we shall meet the Anointed in the air. Meanwhile, we needn't sit around looking up at the sky or waiting for signs.

Being prudent is providing what we need so that our lives will be active. Showing love and joy in being in the Lord.

Matthew calls them prudent despite the delay. He doesn't commend their refusal to share the oil as an example of Christian generosity (that's the

point). We can see they were prudent, but not that we must treat all their actions as models. That's probably where phronimos is harder than sophos.

Prudence doesn't just ask, 'Do we understand the Kingdom?' but 'Do our decisions reflect the values of the Kingdom?'

Matthew leaves the tension unresolved. The story moves from waiting to action: feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the prisoner.

The prudent bring oil. The righteous bring food, clothing, hospitality, compassion.

Both are ready in what they do. Foolish people knew what they waited for; wise people prepared for what waiting would require.

Wisdom speaks with justice. Prudence is the oil that welcomes the Anointed. Maybe this isn't Christ's anointing but hearts made ready? Is the oil that keeps the lamps burning evidence of lives prepared to welcome Christ? Amos says not only is a life like Christ prepared, but it's one marked by justice, mercy and love.

The Anointed One comes. Are our lives ready to reflect his light? May prudence find you as a child finds care: looked after, watched over, prepared for what is to come.

Discussion

Redefining Prudence

- Modern translations often miss the heart of the word phronimos, which the preacher explains as wisdom that acts, discerns, and chooses well in the moment.
- How does shifting your understanding of prudence from mere insight to active, long-term responsibility change how you view daily discipleship?
- Discuss what it looks like in your life to move beyond merely knowing the words of worship to practising sustained readiness.

Provisioning for the Long Wait

- In the parable of the bridesmaids, both the prudent and the foolish fell asleep, but the prudent ones had prepared extra oil for contingencies beyond their control.
- What does it look like, in practice, to cultivate sustained formation and a steady Rule of Life rather than relying on last-minute bursts of spirituality?
- Share how your daily habits and choices help keep your lamp burning during periods of waiting.

Ritual Versus Kingdom Justice

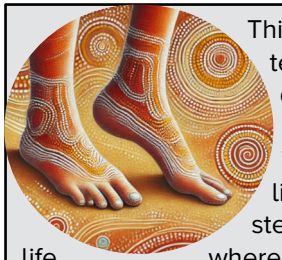
- Drawing on Amos's warning, the Sermon highlights that ritual without mercy is empty and that the journey with God is measured by justice, mercy, and walking with the Shepherd.
- In what ways might we sometimes substitute religious routine for concrete acts of compassion, hospitality, and justice?
- Consider a specific area of your life or community where your decisions could better reflect the active values of the Kingdom.

Reflecting Christ's Light in Action

- Matthew's gospel ultimately moves from waiting to action, linking the prudent bringing of oil with the righteous acts of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and welcoming the stranger.
- How do your everyday routines and interactions demonstrate the fruit of a life prepared to welcome Christ?
- Discuss one tangible step your group can take together to embody Christ's light through service and love in your local community.

Defence Anglicans

- Here to Serve



This five-day Devotional is about prudence as Jesus teaches it: not just insight, but practical wisdom that acts faithfully over time. As you go through it, you're being invited to build a ready life. A life that is formed by the choices you make each day to live out the Kingdom in justice, in mercy and in steadfast hope. It's a step-by-step process towards a life where you have a lamp that keeps burning and a life that is open to Christ.

Day 1
Matthew 25:1-13

In the parable of the ten virgins, the difference between the wise and the foolish isn't some secret spiritual trick. It's simply whether their actions align with the reality of a journey that will be delayed. Prudence isn't about having the right ideas; it's about living in a way that prepares you for a journey that will be delayed. The wise virgins are the ones who have prepared for the wait, for the uncertainty, for the moment when being ready has to become action.

This completely undermines the idea that we can 'switch on' faithfulness at the eleventh hour. Readiness isn't a state of mind; it's the product of a life lived in that way. The point isn't to replicate every detail of the story; it's to accept the invitation of the story. It's about developing the habits that will see your love, your prayer, your obedience, and your service continually supplied in the long run. Prudence is the steady provision that will keep your light burning when Christ comes near (whether that's in the form of a future hope or amid the interruptions of today).

Today, think about what your 'oil' is. It's the very practices, the very commitments, the very choices that keep your life going in the direction of Jesus. You don't produce grace; you can, however, cooperate with it. A wise life is a life which is ordered so that love can keep on coming. Waiting becomes active when you're actually preparing for what waiting will require.

- Where are you tending to fall back on last-minute spiritual effort rather than the ongoing process of formation?
- What are two or three practices that most reliably keep your faith 'burning' (prayer, Scripture, worship, service, rest)?
- What's one fairly obvious 'delay' or pressure point in your life, and what kind of preparation would make it more likely that you'd be faithful in that situation?
- How does this parable change your understanding of being ready? Not as a state of panic, but as a state of being, which is simply the way you live?
- Choose one small concrete step today to 'bring oil' (set a time, make a plan, ask for accountability, remove a distraction).

Day 2
Matthew 7:24-27

Jesus talks about prudence as being built on rock - hearing the word and doing it. It's not a matter of religious versus irreligious people. It's a matter of those who take the hearing and turn it into doing and those who stop at the hearing. The storms will expose the foundations, but the foundations were chosen long before the storms ever came. Prudence is the quiet obedience of day-to-day life which becomes strength when the time comes.

This is, of course, the very point of the Sermon: that wisdom in the Gospel is practical. It's not simply about "do I understand?" It's about discerning what faithfulness looks like in the circumstances you find yourself in. Prudence in that sense is not some abstract notion of morality. It is integrity. Your outward life reflects your inward life.

Building on rock is slow work. You don't pour a foundation in a moment; you build it through repetition, humility, and consistency. If you want a life that can welcome the coming of Christ (however and whenever that may be), begin today with ordinary obedience.

- The lamp will stay lit when the house is built to last the night.
- What's one of Jesus' teachings that you hear all the time but can't seem to put into practice?
- Where do you see a sand foundation in your life? The areas that are built on convenience, on approval, on impulse?
- What would it look like to obey Jesus in one particular situation you're currently facing?
- Who could help you build your foundation through encouragement, honesty and accountability?
- Write down one concrete 'rock' commitment for this week (a specific habit, a specific boundary or an act of reconciliation).

Day 3
Amos 5:21-24

Amos is dealing with a people who know how to worship, who are just as capable of going through the motions as anyone else. His message is not that you shouldn't worship at all. It's that you shouldn't be pretending. When worship becomes a mere ritual and nothing more, it's meaningless. The test of prudence is not how well you go through the religious motions; it's whether your life is at all consistent with the heart of God, particularly in how you treat the poor and the vulnerable.

The Sermon makes it clear that readiness for God is demonstrated in fruit. The oil which keeps the lamp burning isn't just private spirituality; it's a life lived in the direction of love. Amos' call (let justice roll down) takes us from ritual to character. Kingdom readiness is manifested in justice in our decisions, honesty in our dealings, kindness in the exercise of power and mercy in the face of conflict.

This is where prudence becomes courage. It takes real discernment to see that what is 'normal' is in fact unjust, and it takes real steadiness to do something different over time. Ask God to refine your worship into a life which is a life of Christ; a life in which praise and justice are not in competition with each other but are side by side.

- Where might you be tempted to substitute spiritual activity for actual obedience (to justice, mercy and reconciliation)?
- What's one area of your day-to-day life where fairness or compassion could be improved (work, home, money, the way you speak, etc.)?
- Who is someone in your orbit who might feel invisible, unheard or at a disadvantage and what would love require of you?
- How do you respond when living justly costs you convenience, comfort or reputation?
- Choose one specific act of justice or mercy to do this week (advocate, give, serve, repair, apologise, include).

Day 4
Matthew 24:45-47

A faithful and sensible servant provides what is required at the right time. Prudence in this context is not about being particularly spiritual in any dramatic sense. It's about being responsible and dependable. The servant's wisdom is in being reliable and doing the job consistently, in providing for others, in feeding people and so on. It's about being there and doing the work when it's required, whether or not anyone is looking or paying attention.

This expands the concept of readiness: it's not about looking up to the sky for signs. It's about readiness in the form of ordinary faithfulness. Prudence becomes a posture of service, in tune with the circumstances. It asks "What does love require at this moment?" and then does it. That's how you gradually become a person whose life is quietly ready to receive Christ, because their days are already structured around the values of the King.

Think about how your various responsibilities (family, friends, work, community) can actually be places of formation rather than just sources of stress and burden. The aim is not to be perfect; it's to be faithful. The very act of steady service forms a heart that can remain awake even when you're exhausted. It's a heart that is present, reliable, and ready to respond with love.

- What responsibility does God have in your hands at the moment (people, tasks, roles, etc.), and how are you actually treating it?
- Where are you only faithful when you're being watched, and what would 'hidden' faithfulness be like?
- What does 'feeding at the right time' mean in your context? Is it encouragement? Practical assistance? Listening? Generosity?
- How could you reorder or simplify your week so service and prayer become sustainable rather than sporadic?
- Identify one person you can provide for tangibly over the next 48 hours.

Day 5
Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus' vision of final readiness is absolutely practical: feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and the imprisoned. It's not a list of things you do to earn God's favour. It's a picture of what a life lived in the Kingdom of God actually looks like. Prudence is manifest in compassion that is directed towards the person in need rather than away from them.

The Sermon note is the movement from waiting to action. The oil of readiness is mercy. A life of prudence is not simply a life that is ready for the coming of Christ someday; it is a life which recognises the presence of Christ in the neighbour today. When we choose mercy, we train our hearts to receive the Anointed One, because we live in accordance with his nature.

End the week by asking God to make your readiness relational and embodied. Hope is not passive; it is love with hands and feet. When you practice mercy, you're not just doing good works; you're becoming a person who is a light in the world. Prudence is the consistent decision to live in the present as citizens of the coming Kingdom.

- Which of Jesus' examples in this passage most directly challenges your present-day lifestyle (food, welcome, clothing, presence, visitation)?
- Who is a 'stranger' to you (i.e. someone outside your comfort zone) and what would a welcoming look like?
- What's one mercy practice you could actually build into your rhythm so that it's sustainable (a monthly serving, a weekly giving, regular visiting, etc.)?
- Where do you think God is inviting you to see Christ in someone you normally walk past?
- Choose one specific act of compassion to do this week and schedule it with a date and time.



End notes and further reading

Harrington, Daniel J Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew
Moloney, Francis J, SBD, Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John
Johnson, Luke Timothy: Sacra Pagina: The Gospel on Luke
Collins, Raymond F., Sacra Pagina: First Corinthians
Andrew McGowan substack.com/@abmcg
N.T. Wright, Twelve months of Sundays Year A

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Let your faith and relationships
be shaped by love and patience
for God's love is
revealed in lives, not letters.

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