

Ordinary 32 Year A 2020 Josh 24:1-3a; 14-25, 1 Thess 4:13-18, Matt 25:1-13 Scott MALCOLM

When I first arrived in Howick and moved into my new office, there was a photo portrait hanging over my new desk. It was the Rev Vicesimus Lush, the very first Vicar of All Saints Howick, way back in 1850. The photo must have been taken when he had been there a few years because he doesn't look a young man, ... neither does he look a happy man.

In fact, he looked decidedly serious and harsh. It didn't take me long to feel like Rev Lush was getting a bit oppressive, overseeing my futile, poor, modern methods of priesting, so I had to shift him to another wall where I didn't have him peering over me all the time.

You may from time to time have had a look at the line of previous Vicars to this august establishment as well in the hall way. I have to say that the early ones don't look much happier than dear old Rev Lush, but perhaps that's the point.

That they felt that their position as Vicars in this new and perhaps unwesternised land came loaded with some weight that they carried; some of the importance of the gospel, some of the heft of empire. They felt like serious men, and whether they thought about it or not, they portrayed that in their photos and unfortunately, they looked a bit serious and a bit harsh.

And that's what I thought about today's texts, a bit serious and a bit harsh.

In Joshua the people have been in the desert for 40 years, Moses has died, it is Joshua who gives this call. It's a demand for discipleship, to hear and obey in faithfulness the commands of God. Israel is to see the difference between their concepts of gods and the true nature of Yahweh. Yahweh is the holy, jealous God, who expects God's people to be satisfied with nothing less than perfection. Yahweh cannot be bribed, doesn't wait around while other gods are worshipped, isn't small and controllable. Yahweh is the only God, all powerful, all responsible. Yahweh loves Yahweh's people, ... Yahweh expects that love in return. Impossible though this is, the people are expected to demand this from themselves, to work hard and not give up.

**Serious and harsh? This is Joshua's call.**

In 1 Thessalonians, the Christian congregation have been alone since Paul and Silas took refuge after persecution caused by their preaching. The little community was coping, except for a hiccup in their understanding of the moral and ethical demands of the gospel. Paul says ... keep sexual relationships within the bounds of marriage, not complying, is a "lack of love" towards one another. Some, misunderstanding Jesus's coming again, decide to stop working and live off others in the community, this too is a lack of love towards one another, he says. Paul's call is that no one misses out on the resurrection, if they keep working at their faith, doing what needs to be done, not giving up their moral or physical struggle.

**Serious and harsh? This is Paul's call.**

In Matthew, the parable of the Bridesmaids. Matthews congregation are Jewish Christians, persecuted by the faith they have come from, they are waiting for Jesus return. Matthew's story about Bridesmaids who wait for the bridegroom to provide light to the wedding chamber, let's them know what is expected of them. He is late and they all fall asleep. When he arrives, only half of them are ready. The other half are not ... and miss out.

Be prepared, pay attention, work hard and not don't give up.

**Serious and harsh? This is Matthews call.**

These calls come to people in different times and places, yet the call is the same. Be prepared, pay attention, work hard and don't give up.

**Serious and harsh? This is still the call.**

Even today. As different as we are ...

Be obedient, Keep going, pay attention. Work hard and don't give up.

**Serious and harsh?**

Perhaps not, implicit in these readings is that some ... miss out. The unfaithful, the undisciplined, the foolish.

Not because God doesn't want them, but because they don't want God....

How many people began this Christian journey with you when you started?

How many are still going?

**Serious and harsh?**

**This is the call.**

Perhaps Vicesimus Lush and the old guys in the hall  
knew a bit more than I have given them credit for.

Thanks be to God.