

# Archbishop Thabo: Sermon for the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall

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*This sermon was preached at St George's Cathedral on 6 November 2011, at a service of Morning Prayer, attended by Their Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall.*

## Sermon for the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall - Righteousness like an Ever-Flowing Stream

May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit – Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of Life.

The lessons set for this morning have given us Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids, awaiting the arrival of the groom. I suspect that in this year of royal weddings, you, Your Royal Highnesses, know rather more than most of us, about quite how much preparation such occasions require. It even crossed my mind, Sir, that I should perhaps cede the pulpit to you! But let me instead add my welcome to that of the Dean – greeting you on behalf of not only my wife Lungi and myself, but the whole Anglican Church of Southern Africa. May your time with us, this morning and throughout your visit, be richly blessed.

Jesus' call to 'stay awake' and 'be prepared' is of course not merely for wedding guests. This is one of his parables of the end of time, when the Son of Man comes in glory but also with judgement. In using such stories to convey eternal mysteries beyond the grasp of secular language, Jesus' message is nonetheless clear. For everyone, there will be a final reckoning. All of us must give account of ourselves, and of the lives we have lived. Therefore the daily choices we make – the paths we follow, our actions, our words, our attitudes – should be shaped by the knowledge that one day the Son of Man, the bridegroom, Jesus Christ himself, will come, and we must be ready.

Yet Jesus not only speaks of coming at the end of the age. He also promises to be with us always, from now until that time (Mt 28:20). Therefore we must remain awake, like the wise bridesmaids: supplied with oil, and alert to recognise the groom whenever, wherever, he appears – ready to shine their lamps so all may see him. We are to draw attention to the active presence of Christ in our world, so that others may also recognise him, and find his infinite love, and with it, his compassion, his redemption, his forgiveness, his healing, his strength, his courage, his peace. For God dearly longs to meet humanity's deepest needs, whatever they may be, far more than any of us can imagine.

Perhaps some of you will ask me then, 'Archbishop, what then is this oil, and how do we keep our supplies replenished, ready to shine?' The answer, dear friends, lies in prayer; in reading and reflecting on God's Holy Word; and in resting in meditation, in God's presence – in the sunshine of God's love – whether in the daily rhythms of private prayer or in the formal worship of Sunday services.

On this, we must take guidance from our first reading. Amos, the shepherd of Tekoa, was a prophet from way outside Jerusalem's politico-religious elite. After pronouncing judgement on the surrounding nations, Amos shockingly uttered similar condemnation against Jerusalem's leaders too. In the words the High Commissioner read for us, Amos denounced their grand religious observances as hypocrisy. They will find, he says, that on the Day of the Lord, God will not – as they expect – bring great joy, and triumph over their adversaries. Instead, like the foolish bridesmaids, they will be judged, found wanting, and rejected.

For – as Amos' says elsewhere – the powerful oppress the poor, pursuing corruption and perverting justice for their own gain. Their religion is empty – whereas it should overflow with the things of God: justice rolling down like waters, and righteousness like an everlasting stream. And however impressive this Cathedral building, however glorious our music, or splendid our liturgy – it too is meaningless, unless our hearts, our lives, overflow with the justice and righteousness that come from God's immeasurable love for all his people, all his creatures, all his creation.

This is the oil that should burn in our lives – illuminating the truth of who God is, and what he desires for us. As individuals, and together; on a grand scale or in life's smallest details – we are to reflect Christ's redemptive presence in all our circumstances and opportunities.

This may mean speaking and working for social justice, and for just and equitable global economic systems based in the reality of a finite planet and its need for conservation. (You, Sir, stressed these, particularly the latter, yesterday at the University of Cape Town – while the Archbishop of Canterbury has this week repeated his calls for fair financial systems.) It may challenge how we interact with colleagues – especially junior staff and employees; or speak to neighbours; or order family life. It may prompt joining a civil society group, or holding local councillors to account, or volunteering for a Cathedral-based project.

Anglicans have particular opportunities to pursue justice and righteousness, as salt and light in the world. Last month, I accompanied the Archbishop of Canterbury to Zimbabwe, where – praise God – we seem to have made a constructive difference. Last weekend I was with the Church in Canada, discussing options for co-operation, as salt and light to the world. Later this month COP-17 opens in Durban – and we will stand alongside other faith communities, urging governments to make binding environmental commitments. All these are examples of how, together, we can achieve far more than the sum of what we do apart.

Jesus speaks of Christians as the body of Christ for a reason. Athletes training for next year's London Olympics know how hard it is to have each part fit, working in harmony. In a similar way, we know only too well that Anglican differences strain our relationships – but holding together in Christ we can achieve far more together than divided.

Finally, let me end with the best news. We do not shoulder this responsibility for justice and righteousness unaided. Unlike the resources of this planet, God's oil is limitless. All we need do is open ourselves to him, so he may fill us to overflowing. Jesus promises each of us: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock and the door will be opened ... for how much more does our Father in heaven give good things to those who ask' (Mt 7:7,11b).

So, Your Royal Highnesses, dear people of God, dear brothers and sisters in Christ – may God bless us, and bless others through us. Through us may his justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everlasting stream. May it be so. Amen

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