The Kingdom of God is like a Traffic Accident
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Reflection on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-1 and Matthew 25:1-13.
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Most Sundays we take this time to reflect on what it means to live a Christian life. How we can make changes around the edge, perhaps to live that life a little bit better.

I'm not going to talk about that today though. I'm going to assume you already have some ideas about what living a Christian life is like and instead declare that:

The Kingdom of God is like a traffic accident.

I'm imagining most of you are wondering what I am talking about.

Some of you might be aware that I drive a 27-year-old Hyundai. It's an old car, but a good one and it gets me around without too much trouble. I've checked and its one of thirty of its type still on the road in NZ. Some of you might be aware that last week I had a moderately bad traffic accident. The front bumper and grille were completely destroyed. Getting the parts is impossible and the car should by all rights to a write-off…

But. I have a friend who years ago encouraged me to go around stripping down vehicle wrecks and collecting panels and any other useful bits and pieces in the anticipation of something like this happening. So, when this happened, I was able to tap into my collection of spare parts and get my car back on the road for the princely price of a 6 pack of beer for my friend's hard work.

As I was reading this week's gospel, I couldn't help but be struck by the superficial similarities between Jesus' story and my own recent experiences. Jesus tells the story of ten young women. They are set to wait for a bridegroom with lamps. But he's running late. Very late by the sounds of the story. They all fall asleep and, some time later, wake in a hurry, needing to get their lamps going again. Some of them have no oil and end up needing to go down to the town to get some more, which means they end up missing out. Some of them, however, came prepared.

At the time a few years ago, when I had to make a decision about stripping a wrecked car, I could have said 'that's a lot of work, what are the odds of something happening?' But the less lazy part of me got the better of me that day, I took preparations and I am still driving today.

Now, I think most of you know that this metaphor is not talking about car repairs – rather, I don't think I need to explain that the bridegroom represents the coming of God.

I'm not sure how many of you own or have had the chance to take a look at the big Anglican prayer book?

If you turn to the back of that book, you will find the catechism of the Anglican church here, in Aotearoa New Zealand. On this coming of God our catechism says 'God in Christ will come in glory to judge the living and the dead, in the fullness of time. We look to the resurrection life and participation with the saints in glory.' This is what waiting for the Bridegroom is about.

So, what is having spare oil about? What does it mean to be prepared and ready for the Bridegroom? Or to use, my metaphor, what spare parts should we be carrying?

Our catechism also has a few nice succinct sentences on what it means to live a Christian life in anticipation of that day. It tells us we can live a Christian life 'by prayer, by regular worship and by using our time, talents and money to serve Christ in the world'.

It also tells us that 'followers of Christ seek to be loving in all relationships, honest, thankful, generous and forgiving.' It talks about family, working for peace, working for justice and the stewardship of creation. All those things that we talk about Sunday after Sunday and do our best to bring into our daily lives.

However, were I to leave this story as one about preparation for the apocalypse, I think that I would be somewhat missing the point of Jesus' message.

I have shared with one or two of you that, on top of the car accident, there was a death in my family last week. It was shocking, sudden and the person was taken from this world far too soon.

All of you will have experienced moments like that.

If the last two thousand years have taught the Christian church one thing its that Jesus probably isn't coming tomorrow. Shortly before today's parable, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus had declared 'But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so, too, will be the coming of the Son of Man.'

Yet for some reason there seems to be a nonstop conga-line of wild preachers who make headlines, or a hullabaloo on Queen St, quite convinced that they, personally, have figured out the time.

While the world isn't likely to come to an end in our lifetime, none of us know which hour is going to be, individually, our last. 'For no one can anticipate one's time. Like fish taken in a cruel net or like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them.'

Earlier this week, at the funeral of the person I spoke of earlier, I met up with some cousins I have barely seen in many years and we agreed it was about time we caught up. Family

relationships are important and building these things can't necessarily be put off until tomorrow.

Neither can all those little changes you've been thinking of making to live a more Christian life.

We can always put things off until tomorrow. Until we can't anymore.

I would normally finish one of these sermons off by posing a few questions, but I really only have one for you to consider today and that is, 'are there any things that you are putting off?'

And if something immediately sprung to mind for you, now might be the time to stop.