

## Nurturing Faith [Amos 5: 18-24](#), [Matthew 25: 1-13](#)

As the nights grow chilly and dark, there is nothing nicer than the cosy glow of a warm fire. There is something hypnotic about watching the flames rising from the coals, the heat radiating from the hearth. However, in order to keep the fire going, you have to keep feeding it; not only with fresh coal, but by ensuring that it has a good flow of air. It needs careful watching and nurture.

If you remove one of the coals from the grate, (using tongs, not bare hands!) it will keep its heat for a while, fierce and white hot, criss-crossed with little seams of fire, only to cool to a grey lump.

Our Christian faith, if it is to be living and active, drawing others in, needs to be faithfully nurtured, fed and watched over. Our two readings portray what can happen if we neglect this.

The shepherd-prophet Amos was speaking out against the self-satisfied, wealthy people of Israel under the rule of King Jeroboam. On the surface, they were all aglow with religious fervour: extravagant sacrifices, beautiful music and song accompanied their worship. Yet they had removed themselves from the heart of that worship: God's loving heart for justice and righteousness for all.

Like the coal removed from the hearth, they had gone cold. Instead of justice, they gave icy responses to those who were suffering. Instead of being part of the flow God's loving justice, they were choking it. They had not been attentive, living faithfully and watchfully.



Similarly, in the parable of the ten bridesmaids from Matthew's Gospel, we see how five of them were fully prepared as they awaited the arrival of the bridegroom. Even drifting off to sleep for a while did not affect their ability to welcome the wedding party. The five foolish ones assumed that they would always be able to scrounge what they needed. Having been woken up from their slumbers, they are harshly disabused of their assumptions. Their last-minute efforts come too late.

There is a terrifying finality to the phrase: "And the door was shut."

Looking forward to "the Day of the Lord" means that we need to keep nurturing our faith, being like those coals in the hearth, kept warm and glowing. We must not lose our heart for God, and for doing what we can to bring his love and justice into the world. Whilst on this

Remembrance Sunday we recall how others have laid down their lives to ensure justice and to safeguard other people's well-being, we must not forget our responsibility to do our part in the world today.

Nurturing faith during lockdown 2 may seem like a huge challenge. Not being able to meet together in person is painfully difficult. However, even when we are apart, we can cultivate our daily discipline of prayer, deliberately giving time to come into God's loving presence.

Do use the resources available online, such as: -

<https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/going-church/lords-prayer> or

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer>

which will bring you to some helpful starting points. You can phone in to the free Daily Hope phonenumber on 0800 804 8044 for music, prayers and reflections. We have to wait patiently for that time when we will meet again, but in the meantime, we must continue to live faithfully.

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6: 8)

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