Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you must use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)
Wisdom 6.12-16 (or Amos 5.18-24); Canticle: Wisdom 6.17-20 or Psalm 70; 1 Thessalonians 4. 13-18; Matthew 25 1-13

Homily

Today’s homily has been written by the Revd Devin McLachlan, Bishop’s Advisor on Inter-Faith

Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

“Keep awake”, Jesus says, but it might be more accurate to translate Matthew’s Greek to “be vigilant.” Be watchful. Be alert. "Be alert," folks used to say, “the world needs more lerts.”

There’s certainly a lack of lerts in this passage from Matthew’s gospel. You might have missed it, but it wasn’t only the foolish bridesmaids who fell asleep. The wise ones took an unscheduled nap too, all of them snoozing away while they waited for the tardy bridegroom. No one was being terribly alert. But half of them were at least prepared when they were awoken from their nap, with extra oil for their lanterns.

Some of you might have nodded with a bit of self-congratulations at this point in the Gospel. You might be exactly the sort of person who always has a charging cable, a safety pin, a length of twine, some pound coins and a spare handkerchief stashed away in a pocket or purse.

Others of us might have cringed in empathy with the foolish bridesmaids. We’re the ones who routinely forget our house keys, nearly run out of petrol on the school run, and never remember to bring the reusable shopping bags to the store.

But does that mean we’ve no hope of salvation? Is today’s Gospel really a calling to Christians to be well-organised and well-supplied at all times?

In 1908 when Robert Baden-Powell, the English soldier who founded the Boy Scouts, published the motto “Be Prepared” he wrote that to be prepared meant “You are always in a state of readiness in mind and body to do your duty.”

In other words, even the most earnest boy scout might, if on rare occasion, not have matches to hand. But they should be in a state of readiness for their duty, in mind and body.

As with all of Jesus’ parables, we can get hung up on the material details and miss the deeper meaning. Certainly, many of the disciples did. Remember in Matthew 16, when Jesus warns the disciples of the leaven, the yeast, of the Pharisees — and the disciples thought Jesus was mad
because they hadn’t packed any bread? It wouldn’t completely surprise me if, while Jesus was telling this story of the wise and foolish bridesmaids to the disciples on the Mount of Olives, Peter was writing on the back of his hand “Pack…lots of…lamp oil.”

What is our packing list for the life of a Christian? It isn’t house keys or even lamp oil — as in Tolkein’s book, The Hobbit, when Gandalf turns to Bilbo at the very start of their travels and dolefully says: “You will have to do without pocket handkerchiefs, and a great many other things, before we reach our journey’s end, Bilbo Baggins.”

That’s true for us as well on our spiritual journey. We aren’t always going to feel well-provisioned; the life of a Christian is far from comfy glamping. We are not called to burden ourselves, our community and our church, with excess stuff and clutter. We may find on our spiritual journey that in this increasingly secular age we will have to do without many of the things we once thought essential for a Christian community to have.

Yet even so we are called to welcome the bridegroom when he comes, with the light of our souls — alert, vigilant, prepared.

So how does Jesus want us to be vigilant, to be prepared? To live in vigilance is to be in a state of readiness for the tasks which Jesus has appointed. In Matthew’s Gospel, those tasks include bearing witness to God’s kingdom by welcoming the stranger, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and making disciples in all the world.

Welcome the stranger. Feed the Hungry. Visit the sick and imprisoned. Bear witness to God’s kingdom and make disciples.

Today is of course not only the third Sunday before Advent, but it’s also Remembrance Sunday. Across the land, churches this day honour and remember those who fought not only in the two World Wars, but also the more than 12,000 British Servicemen and women killed or injured since 1945.

Yet for Christians, Remembrance Sunday is more than just remembering. Remembrance Sunday, like every Sunday, is a promise that we best serve Christ by serving others in the cause of peace, for the relief of want and suffering, welcoming the stranger and bearing witness to God’s kingdom.

In so doing, in striving for peace and caring for the vulnerable, we honour the sacrifice of the fallen, and we remain vigilant for the coming of Christ the Bridegroom. By his Holy Spirit may he give us wisdom, courage, and hope, and keep us faithful and alert now and always. Amen
Suggested intercessions

the church

Lord Jesus, we pray for your church, wherever two or more are gathered together in your name. May we be alert to your holy presence, and may your church be a refuge of love. In our Anglican communion we pray this week for the Anglican church of Mozambique and Angola; and we continue to pray for the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem.

We pray for the Church of England, for the Diocese of Ely, and for all who minister here in this church [including ________] and all who give of their time and treasure to support our ministry. May we ever be alert to Christ’s call to our church.

the world

On this Remembrance Sunday, we pray for all those affected by war and violence — especially for the people of Israel and Palestine, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria and elsewhere. We pray for those serving in our Armed Forces, and for their families, friends and all who pray for their safe return.

We pray for medics and first responders, for those working for peace and reconciliation, for those sheltering the refugee and the homeless poor, for those working to heal the broken and to protect the vulnerable. May we ever be alert to Christ’s call to peace.

the community

Lord Jesus, we pray for our community. May our community be a place of welcome and of love. May we treat our neighbours respect and with love. May our schools be places of learning and of love. May our homes be places of shelter and love. We pray for those in leadership in our community, for those who care for the needy and the sick, for those who welcome the stranger and comfort the lonely. May we ever be alert for Christ’s call to love our neighbours.

the sick

Lord Jesus, we pray for the sick, and all those suffering in body, mind, and spirit. We pray especially for [__________], and] all those whom we hold in our hearts at this time.

Give them courage and patience in the face of illness and give wisdom and skill to those who care for them. May we ever be alert to Christ’s love, by which healing, and salvation comes.

the departed and those who mourn

Lord Jesus, you have assured us that everyone who believes in you shall have eternal life. Trusting in your great love, we commend to your mercy [ _____ and] those who have died, as we await that great day of resurrection. On this Remembrance Sunday we especially
remember those service men and women who have died in the violence of war, each one remembered by and known to God.

*Suggested hymns/songs*

Seek ye first the kingdom of God
Sleepers, wake! A voice astounds us
Sleepers wake! for night is flying
God who weeps when we are weeping (Tune: Austria)
I vow to thee (Tune: Thaxted)
God is love (Tune: Abbot's Leigh)
O Father on your Love we call (Tune: Melita)
Blest are the pure in heart
All my hope on God is founded
Judge eternal, throned in splendour
God, our help in ages past
Thy kingdom come, O God
For the healing of the nations

*Ideas for all-age worship*

Talk about **Remembrance Sunday** — what we remember, and why (women and men in the armed forces; the cost of war; remembering the fallen – remembering to be age-appropriate and perhaps brief as this is part one). Ask, “I wonder what you know about Remembrance Sunday”

Point to **poppies** as a reminder to remember. (If appropriate you can recite the first stanza of the poem, “In Flanders fields the poppies blow Between the crosses, row on row, That mark our place; and in the sky The larks, still bravely singing, fly Scarce heard amid the guns below.”)

Talk about **what other things we need to remember each day** — little things (such as homework, clean socks, an umbrella on a cloudy day…). Have children list what things they need to remember. Talk about what things help you remember (a song, a list, a note…). Ask, “I wonder what helps you remember?”

Jesus tells a story about ten people waiting up all night for a very special guest, the bridegroom of a wedding. But some of them forgot to bring oil for their lamps — like running out of battery for your phone or your torch. They didn’t remember, and they weren’t prepared. Ask, “I wonder what they could have done to remember their oil?”
Jesus wants us to be prepared, to be ready, for when he comes into our lives. Ask, “I wonder – what do you think we need to remember, as Christians?” Ask, “I wonder what helps us remember about Jesus, and what he taught us?” Let children lead this discussion but be ready to prompt and encourage.

If you like, you could decorate poppies or flowers or crosses with the reminders that children come up with.