

TFTD 23.33. Friday March 31st

Matt 24.36 – 25.13 Keep watch



“Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour” (Matthew 25:13)

This whole passage, including the parable of the ten virgins, seems to be about being in a constant state of readiness.

Jesus points out that the day before the great flood was just a normal day. But the day after, only Noah and his family, the only ones who had prepared for the flood, survived.

Being in a state of constant readiness sounds very

stressful to me.

That's probably because of the recent news of the tragic death of Ruth Perry who apparently took her own life following a devastating OFSTED verdict on the school where she was a head teacher: 'inadequate.'

This brought back all my memories of OFSTED inspections from when I was a teacher. I expect that hundreds of thousands of teachers and former teachers around the country were similarly affected.

My first ever OFSTED came in my second year of teaching. In those days schools would get several weeks' notice of an OFSTED inspection. We spent those weeks working very hard getting ready. In the Modern Languages department we were in school all weekend before the Monday when the inspectors were due in, decorating the corridors with fresh displays. In theory, OFSTED were not interested in any of this. In practice we probably judged correctly that first impressions would count for a lot.

The students found all this highly

amusing. Everything was changing because OFSTED were coming. I used to have a moustache in those days. On the morning of the first day of the inspection, I shaved it off. Naturally the students asked about it. 'I shaved it off for OFSTED,' I explained. I had wondered whether the students would act up in front of the inspectors, but in the event, the opposite was the case. They were not going to stand for OFSTED inspectors slagging off their school. They responded enthusiastically to all my attempts to teach them German.

Soon after this inspection the rules were changed. OFSTED, it turned out, were not interested in seeing what schools were like after several weeks of preparation. Now schools are in a semi-permanent state of OFSTED expectancy.

There is a long list of things that OFSTED say they are looking for. To maintain all these things demands a lot of work; long hours from every member of staff, as well as a preparedness to be ruthless in cutting out a lot of things that might be nice but don't actually impress OFSTED. Some people can't cope with the pressure. They

become ill and leave their jobs, often taking years to recover. And there are plenty of tragic cases like Ruth Perry.

OFSTED generates a lot of fear amongst teachers and fear turns to criticism, anger and distrust. The inspectors often appear to be rather subjective. Certain categories of schools seem to fare much worse than others. The process seems to serve a particular political agenda. Complex reports are summarised in one word 'inadequate' which cannot do justice to the complexities of a school community.

So, some teachers call for OFSTED to be abolished. I have some sympathy with that. And yet, there surely needs to some kind of challenge from outside the institution that calls a school to account. So, what would you replace OFSTED with?

We all need some kind of challenge from outside us, something to call us to account for how we live our lives. Otherwise, we would just tell ourselves lies and never change.

Is the hour of the coming of the Lord like the hour of the coming of the OFSTED inspector? Will the Lord when he comes pronounce some of us to be 'inadequate?'

I think the difference between God and OFSTED is that we have seen God in the person of Jesus Christ. We know God is not going to be fooled by some new corridor displays. He knows the secrets of our hearts. He loves everything that he has made. He made the world and everything in it and said that it was good. We can trust God in a way that teachers don't trust OFSTED.

But we do need to hear the immediacy in the warning Jesus gives his disciples. We need the fundamentals in our lives to be right, just as if we might get an inspection next week. And if anything is not right, then we must not delay; we need to attend to it now.

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