

Sunday 17 November 2024
The Second Sunday before Advent

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Daniel 12:1-3

NT: Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25

Gp: Mark 13:1-8

What large stones and what large buildings! If you have ever been to the Holy Land, you will know just how big those Temple stones really are, So, what must the Temple have looked like before its destruction in AD70? Awe inspiring- no wonder the disciples were amazed. We love bold. We love big. We love better. That's the human motto, in every form, the bigger, the better. People of the first century were no different to us and we to them. While we tend to think that our 2000 years of civilization somehow place us in a different category, Jesus calls out the truth of our humanity- past and present. If we think we are any more knowledgeable than those who first heard Jesus, we are not. We only know different attractions and have more opportunities of being tempted into opportunities for magnificence, grandeur and power.

The Christian Church is not immune from this. We love statistics, membership numbers, financial security, excellent liturgy, beautiful music and building projects. There is no end to the large stones we seek to put in place. If these stones become an end in themselves, rather than a means, then we are in serious trouble. Our faith, our religious life and our churches are not free from the temptation for prestige.

The Church this week has received the news that following the publication of the Makin review, Justin Welby Archbishop of Canterbury has resigned. This news will shock some, will please others- but ultimately this was the right thing for him to do. In our walk with Jesus, we are often challenged to do the right thing, and it takes a conscious effort to do this. It can be easy to get swept away in office gossip, or adding to workplace negativity, but making a stand and doing what is right is the better part. Being in tune with the Holy Spirit can assist us in our daily lives and this can help us to walk the correct path- but we are human, and we do make mistakes. It is important to acknowledge our mistakes, bring them to God and try to move on having learnt from that experience.

Does anyone watch the daytime TV show with Ben Shepherd called 'Tipping Point'? It is based on an arcade game where coins are dropped and pushed along and dropped to different levels and you can win money- in arcades it is played with 2ps, on the TV it is played for quite large sums of money. The tipping point is the crucial point where the coin can either tip or remain. Chapter 13 of Mark's Gospel is a tipping point: we are on the brink of Jesus' own arrest and death, and his lesson, to his disciples, then and now, is crucial. Don't be tempted to compare the kingdom of God with the Kingdoms of this world. The background to the ministry of Jesus was war and the fear of war. Jesus was brought up in an occupied country close to the frontier of the Roman Empire: *'When (not if) you hear of wars and rumours of wars,' he said, 'do not be alarmed; this must take place...For nations will rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom...This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.'*

Jesus tells his disciples clearly: there will be war, disease and famine. Jesus doesn't know when God will bring history to a close: *'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father'*. If the legacy of war, for the time being, is peace, we should be grateful. But we should never ever take peace for granted. This is why

it so important for us to remember all those who suffered and died for our peace and Remembrance Sunday as we marked last week, is a vitally important day in our church year.

In the light of all that has happened in recent human history, we need to stay awake. To stay awake means to never take for granted the blessings of peace and doing all we can to strive for reconciliation whilst we have the time and opportunity. This is so important as we can already see in other parts of our world, there are indeed no blessings of peace and war is ravaging the lives of thousands of people.

Jesus says, do not be alarmed by the wars and battles that are to come. Whatever the extremists say, God is not going to redeem the world through the violent events of this world. However, what he has done in Jesus is to allow the violence of this world to come upon him. And, in doing so, Jesus shows us who we really are and what we are capable of doing to one another, whilst also showing us who God is. God is the victorious victim, the victorious victim who, in the light of the resurrection, offers forgiveness, healing and peace to all- first to the individual and then to the nations.

Jesus knows very well that there will be wars and rumours of wars, and nations will rise up against nations. Through all of this, Jesus wants his disciples to walk with care, for we cannot associate ourselves with the lie that 'big is best'. Jesus wants us to learn to believe in another kingdom, distinct from the kingdoms that are founded on such nations. The disciple of Jesus doesn't believe in rapid and dramatic solutions to the problems of the world- such as may be offered by certain political leaders. The disciple of Jesus believes the Good News about God, that the kingdom of God will come- but come slowly and almost unnoticed.

What could you do this week to advance the kingdom of God and push back the hopelessness? Perhaps by consciously choosing your words, you might sow harmony rather than disagreement. In the letter to the Hebrews, we are told, *'let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another...'*

Meeting together Sunday by Sunday and sharing the Eucharist together is one important step in sharing light with one another. Visiting a neighbour that can't get out of the house may bring some light into the darkness of their day. Adding a few extra items to our weekly shop to give to the foodbank can give much needed relief to those who have less than us, there are many ways in which we can dispel hopelessness and spread light. In these small things, the kingdom will come, slowly and quietly.

Mthr Jennifer Brady