

Talk for All age service Nov 18 2018

Mark 13: 1- 13

Can anyone remember from the very beginning of our reading what Jesus and the disciples were looking at? - The Temple

And what did one of the disciples say to Jesus about it? Something like 'Look teacher, what wonderful stones and buildings'

It was just the sort of remark that people make when they see a lovely building of view. I have heard people visiting this very church say something similar - 'what a lovely church'. And what they expect me to say in return is a polite reply in agreement - Yes, it is lovely, isn't it?

But Jesus doesn't really do that sort of conversation with polite chit-chat does he? He gives a very startling answer - This great huge building is going to be rubble. Not one stone left on top of another.

And you know - he was right. In AD 70, about 40 years later, the Roman Emperor Nero sent an army to punish the Jews in Jerusalem for a rebellion against Roman rule and they destroyed much of the city of Jerusalem. The Temple was never rebuilt.

A few decades later a Roman temple was built on the site, and then a few hundred years later the El Aksa Mosque was erected on the Temple mount and it is still there.

The destruction of the Temple would have been completely unimaginable to the disciples. The Temple was not just somewhere special where God felt particularly close and people went to pray. It was the centre of everything for the Jews - 'The Temple was the centre of everything: worship, culture, sacrifice, salvation, tradition, family gatherings - the power grid of a people, and the holy dwelling place of God'. like the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey and Trafalgar Square and the O2 and the chief Law Courts all rolled into one. Predicting the destruction of the Temple was predicting a huge catastrophe - something like the end of the world as they knew it.

Of course to us looking back the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem two thousand years ago is just a bit of history. There have been many many other momentous, tragic, world shattering events - not least the First world War which we have been thinking so much about these past few weeks. The world was never the same again after the First World War.

There is a special adjective to describe an almighty world shattering catastrophic event which brings about the end of the world --- anyone know what it is? It is an anagram of COPYCAT I LAP if that helps. And it begins with A . . . ? Apocalyptic. The sort of reading we had today, which the Church has decided we should listen to at this time of the year, about the end of the world is called Apocalyptic. The conversation Jesus had with his disciples when they asked him - What are you going on about, the Temple will be destroyed? - was Apocalyptic.

And Jesus gave them Apocalypse - there will be battles, earthquakes, famines, murders and betrayal. Scary stuff. And true enough, as we have seen.

I don't know about you but I would prefer not to think too much about death and destruction and the end of everything I am used to and comfortable with. And talking much about the End of the World is not the sort of religion that I am much taken with, to be honest.

But like he did the disciples, maybe Jesus wants us to consider the possibility of difficult times in the future, of things not always staying the same, of us needing to be brave and trust in the Holy Spirit to give us what we need when we are stretched beyond our own ability?

Have you ever heard young children playing imaginary games and pretending to be lost in a forest, or chasing away robbers, or about to be eaten by a monster? Child experts believe that children play these games, and enjoy scary fairy tales about witches and wicked stepmothers, because in this way they can test out in their imagination skills and attitudes which will help them when they face challenges in real life. Interestingly the children from the most loving and secure families are the ones

who do this most. They can cope with the scariest imaginary situation because in reality they have loving reliable parents watching over them and helping them to become strong adults.

In the same way we as Christians need not fear the Apocalypse, or indeed any unexpected difficulties which may face us in the future, because we are loved by God. We need to think about potential hard times to develop the skills we will need in the future. We need not be afraid because God has our back, as it were.

At the end of the reading Jesus told the disciples to remain strong, to endure to the end, because 'whoever holds out to the end will be saved.' We just have to hang in there. And we are not alone.

The New Testament reading from today, from the letter to the Hebrews (10:23 - 25), concludes with these words:

'Let us hold firmly to the hope we profess, because we can trust God to keep his promise. Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love and to do good, Let us not give up the habit of meeting together as some are doing, Instead let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer.'

There are two pairs of words in there which are repeated several times. 'Let us' - note: not 'you should' but 'let us'

and 'one another'. That suggests that the holding on to the end, whatever comes, is something we are all to do together.

Those words - 'One Another' - are used often in the letters of the New Testament, which were written to Christians facing their own momentous challenges and troubles.

I have here a collection of verses which I hope people will be willing to read aloud to the rest of us. I will ask the children who have been helping one another down here to bring them round, with a microphone. So if you are willing to read out one short verse, please wave your hand now.

To the Christians in Rome

Love one another warmly as Christians, and be eager to show respect for one another.

Aim at those things that bring peace and that help strengthen one another.

Accept one another, then, for the glory of God, as Christ has accepted you.

To the Christians in Corinth

Agree with one another; live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

To the Christians in Galatia

Let love make you serve one another

Help carry one another's burdens.

To the Christians in Ephesus

Show your love by being tolerant with one another.

Be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ. To the

Christians in Philippi

Be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves.

And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own.

To the Christians in Thessalonika

And so encourage one another and help one another, just as you are now doing.

A final thought which comes to Apocalyptic matters from a different viewpoint, from Thomas Merton, an American Trappist monk who died about fifty years ago.

But love laughs at the end of the world because love is the door to eternity and he who loves God is playing on the doorstep of eternity, and before anything can happen love will have drawn him over the sill and closed the door and he won't bother about the world burning because he will know nothing but love. (Thomas Merton)