

Thought for the Day Thursday March 30th 2023

Matthew 24: 1-35 The Day and the Hour



Debris of war: in Jerusalem today, the stones of Herod's Temple are still lying where they crashed down onto the street 2000 years ago.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Matthew 24: 35-36

We are reading today a very unsettling and disturbing section of Matthew's Gospel. Nothing that human beings like to regard as certain is secure. The very Temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed. There are signs here of the End of the Age.

“And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that you are not alarmed: for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs.” (Matthew 24:6-7).

People through the centuries have enjoyed predicting the end of all things. In my lifetime there have been various dates set down for the end of the world. Faithful followers have got themselves ready to be lifted up into heaven at a stated time only for the clocks to keep ticking and for them to be left looking rather foolish!

We are not to concern ourselves with dates and times but to trust in the great purposes of God.

In the midst of all the alarm in these verses is a key phrase which is repeated through the New Testament - “Do not be afraid” or “Do not be alarmed.”

The disciples are to hold on, keep their nerve and remain faithful. God is in control and working for the good of all through Jesus. Yet all around there is turmoil and instability.

We see it in our times and in every time. Russia invades Ukraine with deadly consequences. The Horn of Africa is riven with conflict. Yemen is caught in a bloody Civil War to which the world turns a largely blind eye. Millions across the world are forced to become refugees and seekers of asylum to find safety. Climate scientists warn us in apocalyptic terms of the need to change our ways and live in harmony with the planet but we do not choose to hear. Inequality stalks our land. Many live in wealth and comfort but a few miles away a lady collapses at the Wythenshawe Food Bank having not eaten for six days and with eight pence credit on her pre-paid Electricity meter.

In our unpredictable times we are called to live faithfully and with justice too to show the Kingdom way of Jesus which proclaims a better way to be in the midst of all this. We are called to live with kindness and generosity. We are called to hold on to what is good, to trust and not to be alarmed.

This passage then asks us to hold on to Jesus and to believe that the one who was vindicated by God on the Cross will one day be vindicated before the whole world. We are asked to live with the birth pangs of God's new age and to trust that in his good time a new creation is being born.

“Immediately after the suffering of those days:-
The sun will be darkened
And the moon will not give its light;
The stars will fall from heaven
And the powers of heaven will be shaken.”
(Matthew 24: 29)

These poetic words are taken from the prophet Isaiah and were well understood by the people as code for talking about the huge political and social convulsions of the time. But in the midst of all this what is going on?

“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call and they will gather his elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other.” (verses 30-31)

As we look to Holy Week next week and live through the dread day of Crucifixion and beyond let's see the hand of God on all things. Let's look for the hope which lies beyond all turmoil and know with Mother Julian of Norwich, writing in very troubled times in the Middle Ages, that “All will be well and all will be well and all manner of things will be well.”

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