**LUKE 21: 5-19 SUNDAY NOVEMBER 13, 2022**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

We are coming up to the end of the church year, next week is the Reign of Christ, and the following week it’s the first Sunday of Advent, our church New Year. Time does fly indeed. Our very apt Gospel portion this morning is part of Luke’s description of the time Jesus and his disciples spent in Jerusalem between the triumphal entry into the city on Palm Sunday and the Last Supper and the arrest and trial and Crucifixion and the Resurrection, which none of the disciples were then able to imagine. Naturally the group spent a great deal of time near the temple.

Just in passing, some years ago the ROM had an exhibition of some of the Dead Sea scrolls, and some other artefacts, one of which was a piece of marble which once formed part of the portico of the Temple, and I was privileged to stand within five feet of it for a few seconds. When I realised that Jesus and his companions must have passed beneath it several times, the hair stood up on the back of my neck. It wasn’t the same as the electric shock I got when I touched the ancient Egyptian mummy case, (without permission), this experience was far more profound. I had known for years that Jesus did have an actual physical historical existence, he wasn’t a conglomeration of folk tales like King Arthur, Jesus was quite real. But being near that piece of carved marble that once was part of the temple made it all seem more definite, much more real and tangible.

Jesus here is in full-blown prophet mode. ‘Prophet’ by the way means announcer, more or less. Prophets were not the likes of Jeanne Dixon or Magic Meg or or weird looking ladies wearing lots of shawls and scarves looking into a crystal ball and foretelling the speedy arrival of a good looking young man on a white horse to rescue the maiden fair from her dire straits, prophets are people who see what’s going on, and loudly call out the rulers on the social injustices they see, or the flagrant breaking of God’s laws, and even more loudly announce what the consequences of sin and folly are. Many people are aware that water runs downhill, but they don’t want to accept that sooner or later it hits the bottom. I suspect that may be because they are profiting from all the injustices to vulnerable people. Prophets tell it exactly like it is. It’s not a popular job because the crooked rulers tend to take exception to the truth-tellers. Herod saw to it that John the Baptist was beheaded for example.

I do not think it gave Jesus any happiness to say that the temple would be destroyed.

Equally, I do not think it gave Jesus any pleasure to describe the end times. The false prophets, the wars and rumours of wars, rebellions, earthquakes, famines and plagues. Nobody wants to say things like that are coming, least of all the Son of God who came to join the human race with a mission to redeem us.

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As I look at the situation of the human race today, it is hard not to despair. False prophets and snake oil salesmen are raking in the money, fooling and deceiving people by the thousands. Overpopulation is creating enormous environmental degradation and economic chaos because of the gigantic surplus of cheap labour and the multi-billionaires and people in positions of real power are making obscene profits from the poorest wretches who must do hard labour simply to be able to eat. Formal chattel slavery still exists, there are about twenty million of them mostly in northern sub-saharan Africa, and millions if not a billion in sexual or debt slavery. The climate IS changing, forcing millions of peasant farmers off their land. Famines are happening in Sudan. Covid and ebola are the plagues of the day, and more pandemics are bound to happen. In Pakistan, the aid coming in because of the recent floods is not being channelled through to Christians. In North Korea to own a Bible is a sentence of execution, and the whole of your family, parents, children and siblings are sent to the slave labour camps. There is war between Russia and Ukraine. Other flashpoints are not far to seek. We are watching our neighbours to the south becoming more and more divided from one another. Or consider the political situation in the U.K. Or the near miss in Ottawa where some members of the ‘Freedom Convoy’ clearly stated their aim to take down our government.

This is an appalling state of affairs. It is hard not to be depressed when we think about it.

So, what else is new? Wars are not new. Nor are plagues, or massive social injustice, or greed. Perhaps the population figures are new, but they were bound to happen, given human nature as it is.

But Jesus is still new. Still relevant. Jesus tells us “When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified”, because they have to happen first, before the end days. And Jesus also says not to worry about what to say to the judge when the persecutors haul you into court, Jesus will give you the right words.

Jesus wants us to be happy, to be closer to God. That’s why he came, to save and redeem us. And what he wants us to do? You’ve heard this before: Love God with all your might and main, heart and soul, and love your fellow human beings as yourself. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, tend the sick, visit prisoners.

Pessimism and despair feed upon themselves in a vicious and devouring circle. Fear is incredibly seductive, but love conquers all. If we can hold onto love, no great harm will come to us.

So, let our challenge this week be to turn as far from fear as we can, to turn to God and to love. It sounds so simple, but ‘simple’ isn’t the same as ‘easy’. It’s harder than it might seem.

Luckily, we have our ace in the hole: the Holy Spirit is on our side, all the time, everywhere we go. We need only to listen.

Amen