

SUNDAY 33C
All Saints Birkenhead
The Reverend Jordan Greatbatch

If you are a political junky like me then you may have been paying attention this week to what is known as the United States mid-term elections. This is where the country votes for their governors, senators, and representatives to fill the senate and the house. What was interesting about the election was that it was tipped to go to the republic side and though this did happen, it was not the expected 'red wave'. US politics and politics in general has become a real battleground these past few years. We only think back to 6 years ago with the election of Donald Trump and Brexit. And not to mention now the war in Ukraine and the recent and ongoing pandemic.

There is however always a tendency to read such events as bad omens, perhaps the winds of change are beginning to blow, perhaps this will all lead to some dramatic shift in the future of the

world. Historians spend their time looking back to past events that have led to catastrophic times and try to determine patterns and make predictions.

In an article around the time of the lection of Trump 6 years ago titled 'History tells us what may happen next with Brexit & Trump.' The writer Tobias Stone argues that we are witnessing a change in history that comes about every few generations that can often lead to conflict or a reshaping of the political and economic make-up of the planet.

He writes, and I quote 'Zooming out, we humans have a habit of going into phases of mass destruction, generally self-imposed to some extent or another. Wars are actually the norm for humans, but every now and then something big comes along. Particuly in light of COVID one only has to look at an event such as the Black Death, which devastated Europe. The opening of Boccaccio's Decameron describes Florence in the grips of the Plague. It is as beyond imagination as the Somme, Hiroshima, or the Holocaust. I

mean, you quite literally can't put yourself there and imagine what it was like. For those in the midst of the Plague it must have felt like the end of the world.'

He goes on to argue that the Brexit vote and the rise of Donald Trump and the dictatorship of Russia and the economic power of China are all pointing towards another cataclysmic event.

Whatever we may think of his predictions we have to acknowledge that we are witnessing a shift in power not seen for decades. And more importantly that as Christians we are faced with some difficult decisions and ways of dealing with the change.

Our Gospel today speaks of change, and not only change but cataclysmic events. Jesus says to his followers that 'When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.' That there will be wars, famines and plagues. But that through all this that God will deliver, we will even gain our souls.

But what does that really mean? And how do we 'endure'? What is Jesus asking of us, and what do we make of his words on war, famines and plagues.

As we know such cataclysmic events are a part of our popular culture. They are depicted in our books and films, fairy stories and TV programmes, poems, sagas and myths. Of course this is the basis of our own faith. We celebrate enduring and overcoming death and destruction. Death has become the symbol of all that is wrong with life. For us the evil has been overcome in the victory over death won by Christ in his resurrection.

2

We align ourselves with the good in the fight against evil. In baptism we promise to reject what is evil and resolve to follow Christ, the one who is, for us, perfect goodness. So it is that in each one of us the struggle goes on to allow goodness

to prevail over the wrong which is within. We are only too well aware how difficult it is to allow goodness to prevail. Our so called evil may not be very bad in the scale of things. But our unkindness, our rejection of others, our unnecessary rudeness and so on can be very damaging to those at whom we aim our sharp words.

3

We have come to that stage of the Christian year when we start to think about the Day of the Lord, the end of the world, and the second coming of Christ. These are a part of the traditional Advent cycle that leads us towards Christmas.

These are all ways of expressing our hope and longing for the time when goodness prevails over evil. It is the life of Christ where we can see goodness winning the victory over evil. All the healings and miracles, his teaching and life style,

his death and resurrection, were examples of the defeat of evil, and the triumph of good. This teaches us that we are to look for the presence of God in the world so that we might see where good prevails. There is, unfortunately, a morbid curiosity in us which wants to dwell more on the tragedies of life and see in them the signs of the end of the world.

4

Whenever great tragedy strikes humanity we hear people say that this is a sign that the end of the world is near. We are of course not immune from such outlandish claims even here in NZ.

And as I mentioned, we can read of such things right through history. Whenever there is a catastrophe then people tell us the end is nigh. But no one event means the end of the world. Each event of disaster is a reminder to us that the world is a transient place. These events tell us

that the struggle for good is still going on. We are to make it real.

Today's Gospel was written as the result of just such a tragic event. That event was the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. It is important to realize that the Temple was about the presence of God in the midst of the people.

5

With the Temple gone it was as if God had departed from Jerusalem. The false prophets of the time were saying the end of the world was about to happen. They tied the end of the world to the end of the temple. But Luke's gospel tells us we cannot tie the whole of God's purpose to one thing, one person or one event. No one tragedy means the end, even if it is the temple that has gone. One tragedy may be a sign but it is not the end. The teaching of Jesus is that we are not to believe people when they claim the end is near. What we are to believe is that God's love for us will remain steadfast even in the midst of

tragedy. The presence of God is more important than the events which are happening.

Many Christians have found it more encouraging, more nourishing, more challenging to know that God is near, rather than to wonder if the end is near.

6

So we live with the signs of tragedy and evil, but also with the signs of goodness. There are signs which assure us of the presence of God and also of his final victory.

7

This doesn't mean that we can just expect that everything will get better and better. The Gospel tells us that doesn't always happen. The nature of human beings is such that the battle between good and evil which goes on in each of us goes on in the world at large too. This dual nature of

the existence of life and death, hardship and relief, good coming out of difficulty, will always be with us. Our task is to keep looking for the good; to keep looking for the signs of God in our midst. Not only do we look for the good, we also actively promote it. We know the Gospel is above all political allegiances, all racial categories, the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ is above all and in all. Sadly it seems that people have made politics their God, this is ultimately idolatry, and is in complete contradiction to the Gospel.

In face of such idolatry what we can be sure about is that God will eventually bring good out of evil. That is the message of the resurrection. Right will triumph in the end. God's goodness will prevail. Our task in the present is to show patient endurance as we take a stand on the side of good. "For your endurance will win you your lives."