

Second before Advent
19 November 2006
Eucharist WW, Middleton

Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25
Mark 13:1-8

It's well known that viral infections lay you low. This one has laid me low. It's the worst I can remember ever having had. Part of this lowness has been to question why I am here, and whether I'm any good at it. Why have I forced an upheaval on my and Susan's life. Am I putting my skills to best use? And so on – you can probably imagine. It seems sometimes, when I am down, as if I have indeed reached a kind of crisis point, the temple that was my life (what some people looked on as an equivalent of a wonderful building) having been destroyed. So this morning's Gospel speaks to me. It seems that I am already in the midst of all that destruction.

And I must stop being self-indulgent – there are always people who must think that the world has ended for them. Think of the families of those buried in this group of parishes over the last few weeks. Think especially of 24-year old Jamie Marsden who was buried here last week, or the families of those murdered day by day, week by week. And there's the depressing stuff we hear from the wide world: the patent insincerity and lies of many politicians, the obvious wriggling out of responsibility, the abject failure to display humility, the dishonesty of some prominent captains of commerce, the troubles of dealing with utility companies, the fat cats. And then the middle east where, as Lionel Blue said, things seem to be ruled more by circulating testosterone rather than by honest discussion and listening. There's plenty that could draw us down into despair. There's plenty to distract us from concentrating on God.

In this particular gospel, Jesus is telling us that the kingdom of god – for that is what he's talking about – will not be with us until after the old stuff has been demolished.

- He might have been talking literally
- He might have been talking theologically – in that he comes to replace the old law, to supersede the old law
- But to me he is speaking personally and psychologically, and it is that that I want to concentrate on.

Looking at the readings over the past few months or so, we have heard Jesus

- Advising us to give away riches – the things that bind us
- Re-examine relationships and reject those that bind us
- Being open like children – and have nothing that binds us
- Making no assumptions – that bind us
- Let go of family ties – that bind us

All these things that bind us are for us, individually, the old temple, magnificent in its glory perhaps, but which must be demolished so that new life, new building, can begin.

And I must say that I think this lesson can be read the same way. We must beware those who tell us that Jesus wants us to do such and such. We simply have to experience these instructions for ourselves. We have to grow up – not rely on someone else. And this is why our relationship with God is so important. Why humility is so important.

SO what are we to do as we go about constructing the new life on the ruins of the old? The advice from both readings is: **fix your eyes on Jesus**, not on some makeshift pretend replacement.

We have the parable in which Jesus is asleep in the disciple's boat. The boat is tossed about by all sorts of things, but only the real Jesus can calm it.

So the question that arises from this is who is Jesus? What is he to you?

A few months ago there was an advert on Channel 4 for the revamped news programme. People were asked for words to describe it, and the words they used were: Provocative. Stimulating, Surprising. Disturbing. Unexpected.

It struck me then how much all these words could apply to Jesus and his teaching. I suspect there are as many images of Jesus as there are readers of Scripture.

- spiritual teacher
- charismatic healer
- Stoic philosopher
- political revolutionary
- wisdom sage

- social apocalyptic prophet
- divine Saviour
- craftsman
- bon viveur
- provoker, disturber
- unpredictable orator
- anti-hero who overturned values

And it is in our nature to want to see ourselves in Jesus, so our opinions of who he was quite conveniently reflect what we see in ourselves, or what we wished we saw in ourselves.

But hang on. God is love. Jesus is God.

Ramsey: In God is no **unChristlikeness** at all. So Jesus is Love and Love is Jesus.

So then, all those descriptions of Jesus can be used about love.

Provocative, disturbing, teaching, healing, subversive, wisdom, prophet,

And this could then take us into the 13th Chapter of 1 Corinthians. Jesus is love and love guides but does not insist. It stands alongside. It surprises. It is sometimes angry – hatred of wrongdoing. It is not always 'nice' and it is never bland or anodyne. That is what Jesus is like. And we can see him if we try in every situation and every person. Jesus and love are often unseen until they have gone – like the road to Emmaus.

Jesus is Outgoing love in which we try to discover the other person. Agape. Justice.

The Kingdom of God is all about justice. Love and justice are the same, but love so abused by history that it is no longer safe.

To help us in this relationship, we have only two commands

- Love God
- Love neighbour
- And really these are both the same - justice

Thy kingdom come on earth -

'I admit to a total disinterest in afterlife options, either to affirm or to deny them. They distract from the challenge of Jesus about the Kingdom of God.' Crossan. The K of G is the will of God for this earth. Who would want to believe in a god that could consign people to hell. Heaven is in good shape – it is earth that is our responsibility

God became man so that man could become like God. Hebrews lesson tells us that it is through our flesh, or earthly life lived to the full, that we approach the sanctuary. Pray to him, remain faithful and hopeful, and continue the work of practical charitable love.

Schweitzer

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those men who did not know who he was. He says the same words, 'Follow me!', and sets us to those tasks which he must fulfil in our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether wise or unwise, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the suffering that they may experience in his fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.