

## **Morningside Remembrance Sermon 10.45am 14/11/21**

### **Rumours of Wars**

*Mark 13:1-8*

It is hard to work out, from day to day, whether we live in the best of times or the worst of times. Are we surrounded by signs of hope and positivity, or are we being ground down by relentless bad news and panic-mongering. Newspapers, and some of those who write in them and publish them, fill their pages, in much the same way as broadcast news fills its bulletins, with sing-song voices of doom and disaster.

We live in a time of war and rumour of war, as our Bible passage said from around 2,000 years ago, written in the context of the frequently violent Roman Empire. In the 60s AD Palestine was under threat after rebellion, and Jerusalem, with its Temple, was razed to the ground. Everything we're worried about in our world today – Jesus, and the Bible comprehends. Jesus walks with us through troubled times.

A quick search online shows there are at least eight ongoing wars. Afghanistan, Darfur in Sudan, Kivu in the Congo, the Mexican Drug War, the Boko Haran Insurgency in Nigeria, the civil war in Syria, and the civil war in Yemen. Wars we've forgotten, but they're still there, impacting men, women and children in devastating and catastrophic ways.

The language used around Climate Change is also one of devastation and catastrophe and apocalypse. If action doesn't happen, if resolutions are simply written but not acted upon, then there is an end-of-the-world narrative being written and spoken by activists. At a COP26 exhibition I attended recently, where young people had contributed much of the art-work, the sense of fear, anger and frustration, along with hopelessness, was overwhelming.

Covid-19 has for many had the same kind of resonances with those of wartime. In most of our lifetimes we have experienced the devastating effects of embattled lockdown and mounting fear and helplessness in every part of our society. In our quick-fix, instant-answer, technological world, we found ourselves apparently isolated and disconnected and disrupted.

And yet. And yet.

When we, and our world, feel drawn to embrace the despair, and shroud ourselves in gloom, and echo Private Frazer from Dads' Army, "We're all doomed", Jesus, and the life of faith, does not appear to give up on us so readily or so easily, or to let go. We should never downplay the hurt and the fear and the bitterness and the loss and the seriousness of these times. But it is not the full story, and many of us know that.

Jesus, somehow, encourages His followers and any who might listen to what He has to say, not to focus on signs of what might or might not be the end times. He goes on, in what He says after this passage, to encourage everyone to live in such a way that, war-time or not; pandemic or not; fear of climate change or not; live your life at its very best, and persevere in being good and doing good. Do something. Be something. Positive.

I took a funeral service recently for a woman who had been a nurse all her life. She was a woman of quiet, dependable faith, as it happens. One of the gifts she had, working in the Sick Kids' hospital here in our city, was not only her medical skill, but her gift of honesty with parents who faced unimaginable hurt and trauma because of the severe illness, and death, of their children. What she offered did not reverse the illness or prevent the death. But in her honesty and compassion, she enabled so many of the unspoken hurts to find voice. She helped parents face reality, and sometimes to do things that would help others.

Beside our war memorials this morning there is a little tree, and on it are stars with the names of people. They speak of grief and pain and sadness. It was central to a service last Sunday afternoon where people who had lost loved ones over these last pandemic months and who had not had a formal way of saying their goodbyes because of restrictions, could come here. Whether they were people of faith or not, they could think of what they felt, and think of their loved ones, and acknowledge their tears in what felt in lockdown like a war or rumour of war.

I sat recently with someone whose relative was a victim of violence overseas; who survived the attack but found living with the memory of what had happened hard and had nightmares. Taking a drug to help sleep, their body could not cope, and the young person died. Family in different parts of the world could not attend a funeral, and the only way the family could get their loved one back was to arrange for a cremation, and then have the ashes shipped home. Can you

imagine. But support received, though sometimes hard to accept, has helped them continue to work through their numbing grief. No-one can fix their hurt, or end their loss, but in their dark place, they are not alone.

In wartime, in peacetime, in private grief, in public lockdown, the stories of good things, good people, willingness to help, communities pulling together, isolated people connected, hungry people fed, homeless people housed, go on and on. In times of war and rumours of war, in our apparently endlessly broken society, these fragments of goodness continue to piece together a mosaic of resilient hope and care and kindness. No matter how battered down we might feel, or how overwhelming the odds, I believe, because what faith gives me, strength is given, just about enough, to keep going on.

With the Jesus of faith, though we stumble, though we fall, we find hands reaching out to help us rise up. To take the next step, and the step after that. To pick our way through the ravages, and through faith, and unquenchable acts of kindness, find the pathway to salvation and hope. To build the better world, the safer world, the more hopeful world, the more sustainable world, the more honourable world, the more just world, the kinder world, that should be everyone's mission.

Pie in the sky? Wishful thinking? Not very likely? Let me finish with a favourite story of how, out of the ashes of the last World War, reconciliation and the possibility of a new world might take place.

Canon Mark Oakley, a Church of England clergyman, was brought up by his grandparents. His grandfather had flown with the RAF in World War Two and had been in the raid that bombed Dresden. Mark was invited to preach in the reconstructed Frauenkirche in Dresden. On the way to the railway station after the service his taxi driver asked him why he was in the city. Mark plucked up the courage to say that he had always wanted to come, and being asked why he said, "Because my grandfather was a navigator of a Lancaster bomber, and I knew he flew here on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1945 as part of the bombing raid, and he could never talk about it." The driver was quiet and then said, "Ah, that was the night my mother was killed." He pulled the car over and turned

the engine off. He then turned round to Mark, put out his arm towards me and said, 'And now we shake hands.'"

Out of the ruins of war, or Covid-19, or climate change, or the many other things diminishing our world, the challenge to us is to reach out our hands, to each other, and show through generosity, forgiveness, determination, hope, that we hold out for and work steadily towards a better, different world. There may be wars and rumours of wars. Things may have fallen apart, but the centre will hold. And much to our amazement we will discover that there is still much we are enabled to do, and must do. 'And now, we shake hands.'

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**

**Amen**