

Glory to be revealed

23 July 2023

Isaiah 44.6-8

Trinity 7

Romans 8.12.25

Rev. Alan Keeler Matthew 13.24-30, 36-43

Things to come

It is the time of year when many people are looking forward. Our time is very much governed by school holidays. Many schools broke up for their Summer Holidays this week. There are many people who have been full of expectation in recent weeks. They may now be on holiday or looking forward to one shortly.

In our reading from Isaiah the prophet speaks of God saying:

'Who has announced from of old the things to come?'

The faith of the Bible is about living within time that is going somewhere. There are the cycles of day and night, the seasons of the year, birth life and death. But the Bible understands time as progressing. God is at work, he has his purposes and he is in the process of bringing them to fulfilment.

I heard of a College in Africa many years ago which was training people for the ministry. The country was poor and the life in the college was simple. The food was very much about using maize to produce a simple sort of porridge.

But one student decided to plant orange trees which he did as a great act of foresight. The reason there had been no orange trees was because they took a long time to grow and the person who planted them would not see the fruit. Past students did not look to the future in the way that this imaginative person did.

We are invited to look beyond our present lives to greater possibilities.

Glory to be revealed

The reading we had from the book of Romans is full of the attitude that the future matters and we are not to be bound by all that we see around us now.

Paul writes about glory to be revealed. He knows that our very nature as human beings can seem weak and limited. And yet he says we're not to be slaves to accepted views, natural appetites or personal views forged from our own experience.

Paul says that God is at work and he is like a pregnant woman who is going to bring new life despite the pains of labour. Paul knows the work of the Holy Spirit which brings a fruitfulness to believers. He looks to the future and says have hope and while you're waiting be patient.

These are all attitudes that cut against many of the things in our society. These can make us anxious and unfulfilled. In terms of money it is too easy to take out too much credit. It was famously said take the 'waiting out of wanting' But ironically you will have to want less because interest charges will mean you cannot buy as much. Buying things on the Internet with next day delivery seems so attractive. But if you'd waited a week and thought about it you might have realised you didn't need what had seemed so attractive.

Those last illustrations are of a material nature. The true concerns of the Bible are about society at large flourishing and nations living in peace. It is about humans coming to terms with issues such as injustice, poverty, persecution and war.

Justice

The long history of the Jewish people knew about power that was cruel and oppressive. They had been slaves in Egypt. They had known their own kings who were more pagan than faithful and had been poor rulers. The mighty nations of Assyria and Babylon had conquered and re-enslaved the Jewish people. In the New Testament there is a background of persecution. Jesus is rejected and executed. Paul travels around the Mediterranean and on too many occasions only seems to just escape with his life. When Peter writes his letters to believers it is about being strong in the face of suffering.

But through all of this time and again people call out to God and pray for him to bring justice. All of these experiences are ways in which human life is hurt and spoilt. At its best this crying out is for the oppressor to see the truth and be part of building a world where all might live well.

But quite understandably on the other side there is the cry for in the wrong receive punishment. At times it might look like heartless vengeance or asking for mighty destruction on other nations. Such passion is in the face of great tribulation such as the people of Ukraine are experiencing. But woven through even this darkness there is the belief that God wishes all humans to prosper.

Rather than holding a strong nationalistic view of of people either being them or us; there is the truly revolutionary belief that all humans are all made in the image of God. And even those who proven themselves to fall so far short, may because of God's kindness receive forgiveness and welcome.

Wheat and Weeds

It is with all of this in mind that we are to read the parable that we heard from Matthews gospel this morning.

Jesus began 'The Kingdom of heaven...'
Throughout his ministry Jesus spoke of the presence and activity of his Heavenly Father. In other Gospels they would write of the Kingdom of God. Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience. These people were so respectful for the name of the creator that they would rather not speak of it. So Matthew uses the term the Kingdom of heaven instead.

On the positive side Jesus speaks of the attitude of God as generous and creative. Good seeds of wheat are sown and there is the expectation of a good harvest.

Then on the negative side an enemy comes to sow weeds among the wheat. But this is still the Kingdom of heaven and Jesus is challenging us to know that his Father is continually at work in his world. He remains the King and has his way to deal with the situation. The mixture of wheat and weeds has never been his intention. But he is not defeated and Jesus goes on to explain.

Into his parable Jesus introduces workers who are distressed the presence of weeds and wish the issue to be resolved immediately. But as you can imagine if you go into a field of wheat to find the weeds you will flatten much of the good crop which will spoil the harvest. Jesus proposes another solution which is that wheat and weeds grow together and are separated at the harvest.

But underneath this there is something else as well. Human life is not fixed with the good and the bad. There are plenty of poorly behaved people who have been brought up with bad examples. There are people you've done bad things and deeply regret it. Throughout his ministry Jesus met people who had fallen short, betrayed their nation sought force and violence to get their way.

Jesus' ministry sought to deal with the good and the bad in his society with great vision and

imagination. He taught what was good and allowed people to discover new opportunities that their established teachers did not know. He taught with authority. This was both radical and resented.

Jesus also brought forgiveness and transformation immediately to people. It was not delayed until either they had sorted themselves out or as a judgement after they had died.

Immanuel

At Christmas we welcome Jesus with the title Immanuel which means God with us. Jesus certainly had a very immediate relationship with his Heavenly Father. This experience of God was not daunted by the trouble of the world he lived in. He could speak of God's Kingdom as both a reality and requiring fulfilment at some future time.

Jesus did not see the mixed world as a place to doubt God being at work. In fact he saw it as an opportunity for people to be transformed and society to grow in justice and peace.

There can be a sort of comfort in expecting the worst to happen. We than get a mindset of gloom, cynicism and despair. Sometimes this gets lightened with a world weary humour.

In the film Clockwise, John Cleese is a harassed head teacher who tries to control every aspect of life. He says:

It's not the despair, Laura. I can take the despair. It's the hope I can't stand.

Jesus offers hope, the possibility of change and that life will be unpredictable. There is a bleak comfort in pessimism and staying away from challenge.

But this is not Jesus' way. We are offered fresh opportunity, adventure, and as Paul says for glory to be revealed. This is what drew the crowds to see Jesus. This is what enabled the despised and excluded people to find new life. Jesus called it the Good News of the Kingdom of God. It is offered to us for free but it will cost us our lives ,to make it a reality. But it did cost Jesus his life too. The Glory is that he was vindicated by the resurrection and that is promised to us too.