

## Sermon for Remembrance Sunday 13 Nov 2022

If you ever go to the Holyland, don't miss seeing the huge amazing magnificent model of Herod's great temple and its precincts as it was at the time of Jesus. Then visit all that's left of the temple today. All that remains is a section of wall, often called the wailing wall. The great temple itself was totally destroyed by the Romans not many years after Jesus had uttered the doom laden prophecy we've just heard.

It's still a place of pilgrimage...and its stones are still truly enormous...but it's not even a wall of the main temple building. It's just a remnant of the outer precincts. Nowadays it's surrounded by soldiers You have to go through very strict security to get anywhere near it, but millions of people still flock there, both to stare and to pray, often wailing aloud.

As they're leaving the temple the disciples begin exclaiming about its magnificence. Jesus's reaction must have really shaken them: "Not one stone will be left here upon another," he proclaims, "All will be thrown down!"

What? This magnificent temple of God be thrown down?

This temple built by king Solomon had been at the very centre of the Jewish faith for centuries. It was the place where they believed God actually had his earthly dwelling and where all power and authority resided. This temple had been destroyed once before and the people taken off into exile but now it was back in business. It was even more glorious than before, rebuilt by Herod, no less, for his own devious political ends.

The Jewish religious authorities held to the dangerous illusion that they were in control. They kept the religious laws to the letter but...it was really all about power and money. The very heart of the law, Loving God and neighbour, had been utterly lost. An awful warning to any religious institution. Church, beware!

Jesus then retires to the Mount of Olives opposite the temple and four of his closest disciples come to him asking anxious questions. They've been with him for three years. They've seen and heard the most wonderful things. They clearly don't actually doubt him but being only human they want some clarity. When will this be? they ask. How will we know? Signs can you give us?

So...Does Jesus give them the certainty they crave? No, he most definitely does not. Instead he goes on to give them more fearful prophecies and warnings...but also an indication that there is hope...light at the end of the tunnel of all this doom and destruction.

He tells them that earthquakes, famine, wars, persecutions and utter confusion will continue and increase. Well that has certainly proved to be the case. For two thousand years since then these horrors **have** all continued and increased. But strangely Jesus calls these terrible happenings: "birthpangs".

Those of us who've had the privilege of giving birth will know all about birth pangs...excruciatingly painful...but the joy of new birth is overwhelming, and the agony soon recedes. If that were not so, I doubt that anyone would ever have been willing to go through it more than once and the human race would have died out long ago!

Yes, this strange image of birth pangs is about hope,...hope of new life after anguish...new life out of all the pain and suffering in our world.

It won't be long before the disciples see this demonstrated by Jesus before their very eyes. After all the horror of his arrest, sham trial, agonising crucifixion and burial ...when their faith is in tatters and they run away and hide....after all this, Jesus is raised! Raised to new life in the greatest sign there's ever been, and now, two, thousand years later, because of that little band of believers who saw, believed, obeyed and spread the word, we can have a share in that new life in Christ, both now and in the life beyond the grave.

We believe that by his death and resurrection Christ has already broken the power of evil. Even though it may still appear to have our world in its grip these final struggles **will** one day be clearly shown to have been the birthpangs of the final consummation of all things under God.

Today, in the darkness of this remembrance Sunday 2022, we need to hold fast to that hope and what it cost. Bombarded as we are by news of war in all our plethora of media, we can become desensitised, if we're not careful, to the devastation and suffering it brings. We must not let that happen. This Remembrance Sunday as our minds are refocused on all those who have suffered and still suffer as a result of war, let's stay passionate about fighting and praying against injustice wherever we find it. . . at the same time being peacemakers wherever possible, in our own lives.

Remembrance Sunday began after World War I known as the "war to end all wars". How hollow that now sounds. Has there ever been a time in the world when there was not fighting going on somewhere? Wherever relationships have broken down, from individual circumstances right through onto the world stage, there is still war.

In the darkness of the times we're now living through we'd do well to remember some lines quoted by the grandfather of our present king in very dark times nearly a century ago. It was Christmas 1939 and we were plunging headlong into the unthinkable horrors of world war two.

King George 6<sup>th</sup> was preparing to make a Christmas broadcast to the nation and these lines were brought to his attention by his wife, our present King's beloved grandmother. They come from a poem entitled "God knows", now popularly renamed:"the gate of the year". They can speak to us just as powerfully today as they did then:

'And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.

And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.'

Carole Lewis