

Advent 1 – 10.30am Wesley Uniting Church – 2nd December 2012

Theme: “Hope in the Future”

Reading: Luke 21:25-36

Text: “When all this starts happening, stand up straight and be brave. You will soon be set free.” Luke 21: 28 CEV

Introduction

We live in a fast changing world where much of the future is unknown to us at this time.

This was recently highlighted to me as I reflected back on some changes in the past 21 years. Back then, in 1991, I was serving on a ship in the Gulf of Acquba with Jordan on one side, Israel on the other and Egypt behind us so to speak. Our communication home was written letters and a 5 minute radio phone call home once a fortnight. Sometimes the echo made the calls almost impossible but we would ‘hang out’ for the opportunity to speak to our loved ones and wait patiently for letters that brought more news from home. Then in 1999/2000 I found myself in East Timor. We could receive emails morning and evening, hence communicating with home was quick and relatively easy. Also when in Dili we could use our mobile phones to call home. Now of course with Facebook and Skype the communication is even easier and in ‘real time’ so to speak.

The changes in technology just keep coming.

Do you ever ask, ‘Where is this leading us?’ and ‘What will life be like in fifty or a hundred years’ time?’

More importantly are questions like, ‘How will our character, personal qualities, attitudes and values change?’ ‘Will we deal with each other in a more just fashion or will the world, as we know it, fall into chaos?’ ‘What about our faith – how will we relate to God?’

Fascinating questions in the light of the Gospel for today from Luke 21.

Good News

This first Sunday in Advent is a day when the church thinks about the final coming of Jesus, sometimes called ‘the second coming’. From the early days of the church, Christians believed that the same Jesus whom they had come to know and love, would come again at the end of the world to consummate all his works of grace, mercy and love. At first, like St Luke in today’s Gospel reading, they expected the end to happen within their generation. This of course did not happen so they had to adjust to the fact that God’s time may well be a little different to our time. God didn’t appear to be in a hurry! Yet the teaching and understanding, that in God’s time, this will happen was taught and is rightly still taught to this day. Unfortunately, the Second Coming has been linked with preaching of doom and gloom, of judgement and attempts to terrorise people into believing or else!! However the Final Coming of Christ Jesus is first and foremost a message of hope and joy. Luke declares that whenever the negative forces throw their weight around, when wars and suffering are everywhere, when horrendous natural disasters happen, when evil flaunts itself, we should not be afraid. Rather there is the call of the Gospel, the Good

News, “to stand straight and tall and be brave – You will soon be set free.”

Luke 21: 28b

Quite a different slant on this passage than is often taken as people tend to live in fear of the world. If as Christians we believe the world is God’s and God cares for his people, you and me, then even in the midst of seeming chaos our faith gives us hope whatever the future may be. Suddenly there is a different focus, central point, to what is happening around us. Christ is the difference.

The Christian Contrast

Bruce Prewer, writing about this passage, says the following that gives hope as we enter the season of Advent, as we prepare again for the Christmas events. He writes:

‘The Christian Gospel of the Final Coming of Christ is good news. The ultimate future is in his hands. The end is Jesus shaped, Jesus coloured and Jesus textured. Agape love, that wanting the best for all people, rules everything and everyone at the end. To live with him and for him is not only a noble way of life, it provides an immovable foundation, it was, it is and will be a sure winner. Here and now we can be people of that assured future. Profoundly yet simply, we can be people of hope; people who embrace a piece of the Jesus-future and embody it day by day... In the eyes of critics who are committed to the stale old world and its selfish obsessions, those who follow Jesus are freaks and the church is the fellowship of losers (a little harsh!). We have outmoded thoughts about values. For example; blessed are the meek, the poor, the merciful and those with needs! But what glorious freakishness. We are before our time.

We are a people who know the end of the story, the way things will end up, and we start living that story now!”

It is why we care for the asylum seeker and refugee, those with disabilities, those caught in the domestic violence cycle, those with nowhere to live, those who are in war-torn and famine ridden countries to mention but a few things. We care for the people of God’s world.

‘Therefore into the sour face of all the negativity and anxiety that mouths-off around us, we speak the Advent Gospel of hope for the future.’

Conclusion

Technology may change at a rapid speed, aspects of the world as we know it will change into the future, but we are called, in faith to, ‘stand up straight and tall and be brave – you will soon be set free’.

Prepare afresh for the Christ event during this Advent period and be a people of hope.

Prayer

Most wonderful God, keep us alert to all your works around us, that at his coming the Lord Jesus will neither find us apathetic nor so frenetically busy that we have no time to smell the beautiful roses that are so gorgeous this season, or to have a friendly chat with a lonely neighbour. Come Lord Jesus come. Amen.