

United Benefice of Old Brampton and Great Barlow

Fr Stanley Monkhouse Sermon Archive

Year B – All Saints

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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- He might have been talking theologically – in that he comes to replace the old law, to superseded the old law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.

Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnation of love, whose suffering, death and resurrection transforms us, and whose righteousness dawns upon the world scattering the darkness of injustice, grant us courage to keep our eyes on your example to bring about the kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven.

Second before Advent

19 November 2006

Evensong WW

Daniel 3:13-20. SMA not burnt

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43. Wheat and chaff

One of my great joys in life is sharing ideas with people. I am lucky to be able to do this, and I've enjoyed tonight's because to be frank I've never really thought through some of these issues before.

- A bit like this morning's.
- Voice.
- Not well worked out.

Kingdom stuff.

- Parables by Jesus about the kingdom
- Parables of Jesus and the kingdom
- And tonight we have a parable of Jesus.
- Interpreting is not easy. Imagery of the middle east.
- The fire is great imagery here – and it is much used in Sunday schools etc to kindle children's imagination, but don't read too much into it. It's just
- In short, the message is that we should let the good things and the bad things grow together – God will sort it in the end, and then the righteous will glow in the fire like S, M and A.

What really strikes me about this passage is God's instruction that we leave the weeds alone, we don't pull them out, but we leave them to grow alongside the good seed. Things will be sorted at the end – in God's time.

Why is this?

Is it because we might mistake good seed for bad seed, and pull out the wrong stuff?

Is it because it is not our job to exercise judgment?

I think both of these things.

We are talking about God's time, not ours.

So what counts as weeds?

That depends on where you stand and look from.

- If you're in the White House, you would have one view about what constitutes things that need pulling out.
- If you're in the slums of Sao Paulo, you'd have another.
- If you are one of the victims of the Farepak collapse you might think that the chairman in BA needs rooting out.
- If you are one of the young men I know who are on the list of young offenders in Derby, you would have a different view.
- And if you are living in affluent suburbia, you will have yet another view.

Who is right?

And by what means are these judgements made?

We need to remember that on the whole, the people who make the law do so in order to hang on to what they already have – a kind of colonial rape followed by military might to keep what they have.

- Some of those young men I spoke of can tell you stories that might make you think that the poor have a duty to steal from the rich.
- I know people whom society would castigate as tearaways who are far more loving and loyal to their own families than apparently upright citizens.

This is controversial stuff. And the kingdom parables in the Bible are controversial stuff. It's just not fair that the person who works for one hour should get the same as he who worked for the whole day. But then, you could say it's just not fair that part time GP lecturers ...

And then we might think tares were wheat – we might get it wrong. It sometimes takes a while for ugly ducklings to mature into swans.

Me and students – you can never judge the effect. You never know what are healthy seeds and what develop into tares. Indeed, it is possible for a remark to be interpreted in two different ways. How can I make a judgment on that.

I am saying by all this that it is difficult to make judgements.

Right and wrong. Wheat and chaff.

The kingdom is one of justice, (love)

Justice when people are no longer disadvantaged, or trampled on, or colonialised,

Paul writes about having sufficient riches so that nobody is poor.

Love God and love neighbour.

How?

Love and justice are the same, but love so abused by history that it is no longer safe

Justice not vengeance

Justice is the kingdom

Freeing slaves, Jubilees

Cancelling debt

Just distribution of land

But this is not just about economics. It is about allowing people to grow. And how can the wheat grow straight and good when it has been hampered from the beginning by faulty sowing, or by faulty husbandry. Bad upbringing, lack of love. I for one am ashamed of the way I thought duty was as good as love in bringing up my children. I hope to goodness they have forgiven me. Truly the sins of the father are visited on the children ... And we all do it. Fortunately they still talk to me, and love me, and eat and drink with me.

It is about not abusing people by heaping expectations on them, or shoulds, or oughts.

And when is God's time

Then? Possibly. Paul is coy.

Jesus seems to be wrong.

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We don't know when God's time will come.

At the time of death – and anyway each one of us is only a lifetime's away from knowing, so what does time matter.

Thy kingdom come is different for each of us.
Psychological truth of Jesus Christ's teaching

Parables about kingdom.
Healing the planet

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.

Unpack this a bit
So we follow him as best we can.

Who is capable of living by J's rules – forgiving those who kill you.

If Jesus Christ were to walk in now I suppose he might say to me

Well Stan I've heard your sermon and it was quite good in an unsophisticated sort of way.
But will you join me in my program?

I'm not sure I have the courage, but I try to describe it in such a way as not to falsify your message to suit my own stupidity. Is that enough?

No Stan, it is not.

Which of us will have the courage to stand with the oppressed, the deprived, the lonely, the destitute, the tortured.

All we can do is bash on, not losing heart. This is very difficult amidst the slings and arrows ...

Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnation of love, whose suffering, death and resurrection transforms us, and whose righteousness dawns upon the world scattering the darkness of injustice, grant us courage to keep our eyes on your example to bring about the kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven.

EMMTC 6 November

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25

You've got to choose

Psalm 78:1-7 *or* Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16

The story of what happens if you don't, *or Wisdom will be made known to those who seek*
or Amos 5:18-24 Day of Lord will be judgment

Wisdom of Solomon 6:17-20 *or* Psalm 70

more wisdom, or wonderfully human psalm – take out my enemies but be nice to me

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

comforting the Thessalonians who were worrying about death. those already dead will die first.
judgment day will be OK for you. trumpet calls etc.

Matthew 25:1-13

Wise and foolish virgins and notable that the wise look after themselves – not a lot of charity about there. Take responsibility for yourself.