



Sunday, 17th November 2024 | 26th Sunday
Let justice flow like a river ...

Greetings my brothers and sisters in Christ, what a joy to be here, on the 26th Sunday of Pentecost growth, and then in a fortnight's time we commence the Church's joyous season of Advent.

Isn't it a blessing that we can come together to worship, have fellowship, encourage one another and give thanks for the many blessings that our loving heavenly Father continues to bestow on us all. I pray that today's message will lift all our spirits, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, committed to lives of service, in God's Kingdom!

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love. Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I found some more good challenges from our Gospel reading today and on a deeper comforting understanding from the good commentaries available. They give great comfort and confidence, that once again challenges our attitudes and understandings, causing us to think more deeply.

Today's Gospel reading from Mark is a good example! It seems to be talking about the future, though there is no indication about how far away that future is, certainly close enough to impact on present behaviour. Nearly every historical era has read these passages in Mark, as closely describing its own circumstances, and pretty well every era has then given in to the temptation of second-guessing God's judgement, especially over the last 100 years as media, communication both electronic and printed, the internet has exploded into our lives, bombarding us with their so called truths!

But that is precisely what all the passages deplore.

- What the disciples long to know is: **'When?'**
- We note, they don't get an answer.

An interesting observation from the Gospel's reading is, we notice that the disciples very often have their eyes fixed on the future. They are aware that they are part of something important, but a lot of the time it doesn't feel important in a way that they can identify. Now, finally, Jesus seems to be talking about revolutionary change.

'At last', they say, 'So when is it going to happen, and how can we be sure that we're ready for action when the time comes? What will the signal be?'

You can imagine our Lord's frustration as he simply describes to them the world that they, and we, have to live in. And importantly, as in any time of anguish, what is missing is any way of being really sure where the truth lies. Many different factions will be claiming to represent the work of Christ, and every side in every conflict will be sure that right is on their side only.

Reality suggests that we Christian disciples will not always get it right. Some of us will be 'led astray', and we will not always be able to resist being alarmed. We have to read the rest of Chapter 13 to find out what strategy Jesus recommends, we get a clue.

It is a really difficult one, and it involves an alert restfulness and concentration on the figure of Christ that has certainly not always characterized the Christian Church, and generally doesn't today.

We are still more prone to shout ***When?*** When will you come, Lord, and show the rest of the world that I'm right and they are wrong?'

But Hebrews recommends the exact same strategy as Mark.

- Concentrate on Jesus!
- In the work of Jesus!
- Everything is already accomplished.

We may not always see and feel that. Caught as we are in the middle of the anguish, and Hebrews does not want immunity from reality for us. It says we must step into Jesus, into the suffering, torn flesh that is our hope and reality. The assurance that we have in Christ is not an assurance of protection or tranquillity, not even a fail-safe method for discerning wisdom and righteousness, but just a total dependence upon the faithfulness of God.

- The judgement is not ours!
- It will not fail if we are not at the centre of it.

The work we are given may seem insultingly small, and yet, at times, we are quite incapable of even that much. Hebrews says we have to learn to live together, even with those we have not chosen, in love and kindness, 'encouraging one another'. Hebrews 10:24-25.

We would much rather charge around, wielding judgement in God's name, but remember that in Mark, Jesus says that is just what impostors do. Christian disciples work at living together!

When we experience God's love in our lives and share it with others, we do not need to fear. The future punishment that awaits those who do not believe does not concern the "abiding" believer. The two-way relationship of God's love in our lives gives us confidence and security.

Let me finish with some comforting passages from the New Testament.

- 1 John 4:18: There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love.
- and from Mark's gospel Chapter 13: 35-37:

³⁵Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.' But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Amen.