



16th November 2025

23rd Sunday after Pentecost

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

YESTERDAY • TODAY • FOREVER

Our hope of transformation

Greetings my brothers & sisters in Christ, it's wonderful to be here, as we come together to worship and give thanks to God, and celebrate the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost.

I pray, that today's message will set our spirits on fire, as we journey together, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, committed to lives of service, in God's Kingdom, here in Southlakes.

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.

What an encouraging set of readings we have again for today, all with a similar theme, leading up to the beginning of Advent, all about endurance and encouragement.

From our first reading today, from the book of Isaiah, we see, a prophetic oracle of promise and restoration to God's chosen people!

Our history tells us, that this was a difficult time for Israel. The Israelites had been allowed to return from exile, in Babylon, after the Persian King Cyrus took over control of the Babylonian Empire and reversed their policy of holding captive peoples. In 538 he allowed the Israelites to return home if they chose.

So, this passage is about hope and faith, and how that faith and hope might be expressed in specific ways will depend largely on what a particular congregation or group of believers needs to hear to meet whatever darkness and hopelessness they face. That is the nature of hope!

It is on that basis of hope that we are called to be faithful to God in the world. Not to make the future happen, but because it is a truth about God.

We are called to live in the world on the basis of the certainty of that future.

Hope, and faith, that God will not leave the world the way it is, it

- frees us to be his people,

- frees us to light candles in the present darkness of sin, knowing that finally the darkness will be vanquished!

What a wonderful message that is to us all!

Now to our second reading. The Thessalonians were very happy with the first letter from Paul, but they began to ask themselves further questions, which left them uneasy.

Paul had not told them anything about when the Parousia would happen, and some of them, who were perhaps naturally nervous or impulsive types, were making out that the Parousia was in fact imminent. This sort of thinking made them disinterested in things around them.

This is the new theme of Paul's second letter, written some months later, a letter which is a logical extension of the first.

A maritime city like Thessalonica, with a sizable proportion of unemployed and idle people, was just the sort of place where gossip, intrigue and false rumors thrived. Sounds a bit like today's culture doesn't it?

And naturally, among recent converts to Christianity, there were some people who felt disinclined to do a solid day's work and more inclined to speculate about the future and discuss predictions than to take Paul's teaching seriously and follow the example of his hardworking and orderly life.

In this letter, the apostle, after encouraging them to remain steadfast in the faith, goes into more detail about "the day of the coming of the Lord." He tells them that it is not around the corner, for first two main things must happen: the great rebellion and the advent of Antichrist.

These haven't yet happened, so why should they make the mistake of thinking that the Parousia is imminent?

We don't know who or what this Antichrist is, or what power restrains him, Paul letter tells us nothing about this.

All Paul does is, warn them not to be impressionable and not to be alarmed by mere rumours, because this could undermine their perseverance in the faith.

What good advice for us today!

Many of us know the name Usain Bolt.

He is the only person to have won the 100-metre and 200-metre gold medals at three consecutive Olympics.

I imagine that very few of us, however, would recognise the names of Samuel Kamau Wanjiru, Stephen Kiprotich and Eliud Kipchoge. These were the gold medallists for the Olympic men's marathon in the same years.

Why does the sprint hold such a high status for us?

Is it because we are so often drawn to what is immediate, exciting and dramatic, rather than what is long-term, seemingly ordinary and gradual?

There is something important to notice here in relation to our Christian life.

In the Gospel for today, Jesus speaks to his disciples about the end of the temple and the end of the world. In either case, there is a need for Christians to be spiritually prepared for the great calamities of history and not be led astray by those who would deceive them.

Jesus encourages the disciples that he will help them bear witness by his Holy Spirit in the face of betrayal and persecution. Through all this, Jesus says there is a need for his disciples to have endurance.

The trials Christians face in this life aren't to be met by short bursts of spiritual energy but rather by the long-term durability of the ordinary Christian life. Following Christ is more like a marathon than a sprint.

We cannot, of course, endure by our own strength. We look to the one who as (Hebrews 12:2) for us, *'endured the cross, despising its shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God'*.

(Romans 15:13) tells us, God sends us his Spirit, who works in us an abundance of hope, which pulls us forward when we feel like giving up – an experience every marathon runner feels at one time or another.

In our struggles through personal spiritual growth, life in the church, vocations in the world, mission and evangelism, let us remember the big picture of the marathon we are in and hear the call to endurance. By it, we will gain our soul.

We have developed new rules to suit new times. Our prayer must be that our worship is acceptable and pleasing to God.

The exciting part of today's reading is not about how far we have drifted from God – evidenced in so many of the challenges that exist in society today – but rather, the promise, the hope, that with redemption comes transformation.

We long for the time when we see our children keeping God's name holy and standing in awe of our God, not to mention gaining understanding as they seek instruction.

May we as Christians be caring and welcoming, so that we see more people finding redemption and being transformed by God's saving grace. And may we continue to find new ways of sharing Christ's love within our community.

Closing prayer

Transforming God, help us to be good ambassadors for you. You came to us as a child of lowly parents. Open our hearts to see beyond the outside trappings of worship and our church life and find new ways to share your love. Grant us generous spirits so we can celebrate differences and rejoice in changes and inclusiveness. Amen.