

Sunday Thought

14th November 2021 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

1 Samuel 1: 4 - 20

Psalm 16

Hebrews 10: 11 - 14 (15 - 18) 19 - 25

Mark 13: 1 - 8

Beginning at the End

Today being Remembrance Sunday I have been reminiscing – counting back through the years! Sixty years ago, I was privileged to be among the early visitors to see the beautiful new cathedral in Coventry and share its dream of becoming a centre for world peace. New life had emerged from the ruins. Eighty years go I was just old enough to stand with my father watching German bombers fly over us on the way to destroy London. As a teenager I witnessed some of the rebuilding of the city. The two memories came to mind as I read our Gospel for today.



Jesus was in the new Jerusalem Temple with his disciples. The temple, like the cathedral was both a centre for worship and a tourist attraction. It had been reconstructed under Herod the Great's direction and was having finishing touches applied. Built in Jerusalem limestone with cedar wood and gold furnishings it was a magnificent feat of

architecture covering thirty-five acres. (That's about seventeen football pitches). One of Jesus' disciples commented on the beautiful stonework. They were all surprised by Jesus' reply – *'But it won't last! Forty years later it was in ruins, destroyed by the Roman army.*



A little later, sitting together on the mount of Olives, overlooking the gleaming white Temple structures, Jesus' friends asked, *'Are we at the End Times? End of the world? The time of Divine Judgement?'*

'Signs of the End Times are always with us,' Jesus told them. *'They remind us to live our lives responsibly, with the Father's Judgements in mind.'* These *'signs'* are all around us - wars, famines, earthquake, fire, flood. They are like the birth-pains of God's Kingdom – a reminder that God is in charge of his world and new life is constantly emerging.' The apostle Paul also speaks of God's coming day of glory when all creation will be new and present troubles will be seen as pangs of new birth. That is an appropriate word during the Glasgow COP26 meetings. Some people have been speaking of the 'End Times' for our world if sensible and workable decisions are not made by all for solving the problems of climate change and environment conservation.

The same thoughts were expressed in times of World War and even now in the present pandemic. However, we learn from Jesus and Paul that the Christian approach to these 'signs' is to trust that *ends are beginnings!* War and horrific suffering, dreadful as they are, can be followed by peace, renewal, and reconstruction. With God every Cross points to sure hope of Resurrection with Jesus. Many of us have been able to prove that in our personal 'end time' experiences when with courage, faith and hope we have stood among the ruins and asked, *Lord! What are you going to rebuild here? With me?*

So, again my thoughts turn to the post pandemic church. While wars were being waged in Europe a century ago, theologians had been talking of a religion-less church and how to restore the spirit of the first church in their own day. They longed to make the Christian faith relevant to new generations. I still hope the pandemic could be another opportunity for those questions and a new understanding of church, but I fear we may once again be missing a re-birth opportunity. However, for those who seriously seek such a new beginning the writer to Hebrews in our reading today has some guidelines for the 'real church'. The church is for those who by their faith in Jesus have found God's *New Way* of spirit-filled life. Together, they come close to God in life and worship, trusting him to keep his promises of eternal life, knowing he is With Us always, strengthening our love and hope and faith. We are to be a loving and caring family who continue to meet with each other and with God in Jesus. These essentials are a starting point for a renewed church in a new age.

Do read the Samuel story. It has many recognisable modern touches. It involves a new beginning as Samuel's mother, Hannah, dedicates her *prayer-answered* child to God's service. Through Samuel's ministry God will bring his people back into line with his divine purposes for them.

A Prayer (with Psalm 16 in mind)

Lord, I have every confidence in you.
Trusting you I feel safe.
You are all I have.
You provide all the good things I need.
You guide me and warn me
when my body, mind, and spirit are danger.
When darkness envelopes my life and thoughts
your presence is my light.
My future is in your hands.
It is my great joy to be among your faithful people,
living together with you in sight of your
Kingdom and your Glory!

