

19th November, 2023

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe,

light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song:

This is the day that the Lord has made
We will rejoice as we lift His name
This is the day that the Lord has made
Come and rejoice, we will rejoice and
be glad in it

Whether the sun will shine
Whether the skies will rain
I know that You are good
And this is the day you made
Whether in life or death
Whether in joy or pain
I know this truth remains
That this is the day You made

This is the day that the Lord has made
We will rejoice as we lift His name
This is the day that the Lord has made
Come and rejoice, we will rejoice and
be glad in it



The Good
Shepherd
Four Marks

Responding to God's Love

Now I can walk in faith
You will protect my way
Your every work is good
And this is the day You made
I am a child of Yours
You are the One who saves
I am redeemed by love
And this is the day You made

This is the day
Come and sing your praise
For the Lord now reigns
On the throne of grace
Soon is the day
He will bring us home
And we have this hope
For we are His own

This is the day that the Lord has made
We will rejoice as we lift His name
This is the day that the Lord has made
Come and rejoice, we will rejoice and
be glad in it!

The Sermon by Robert Hughes

Read Matthew 24:30-35 & Romans 10:11-15

Unlike pure hope, this trust rests upon the concrete evidence Jesus summarises from his heavenly perspective, evidence that ought to be more obvious to us:- The state of the world! Matthew's Chapter 24 carries a nuanced message. Today's Gospel is 'awkward', 'edgy', 'visionary' or, - given Jesus subject is 'the end of the world', we can call it 'prophetic'. But it's subtlety might obscure the fact that Jesus is very much more concerned with why the end will come than he is with when or how it arrives.

Plain meaning is often the best guide to scripture, but not always. Scripture can stimulate wide interpretation. So Jesus' reference to his return to Earth - a return that ushers-in the 'end of the world', invites deep questions. It's a puzzle shrouded in mystery: Yet Matthew's account captures something of Jesus' divine nature, otherworldliness that lends this strange narrative a contrary, yet unmistakable, kind of 'authenticity'. "Tell us", the disciples plead, "when will this happen and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age", (v24:3). There cannot be a bigger or more pressing matter. So Jesus' piecemeal answer must have been received as a huge anticlimax by his disciples. In summary he tells them we will know the end is coming when we see its approach with our own eyes, (v27, 30, 31, 32). And, in case we aren't picking-up his underlying message, he adds, (in v36), "I really don't know. It's up to God!" It's a verse not to be overlooked!

What emerges from our reading is the importance of trusting our senses. Jesus directs us to connect cause with effect, to pluck his truth from the tangles of the present moment. What happens today is likely to be the outcome of yesterday. The present explains the past, renders it understandable, even predictable. So what was our part in yesterday? Did we bring peace? From Jesus' heavenly perspective the world's direction of travel is all too evident. And surely the essence of the faith Jesus teaches is to bring us all back into harmony with God - to acknowledge and nourish our gift of life, not to twist and destroy it.

There will be 'wars and rumours of war' before the end. What's new? There are always wars and rumours of war. But that's the point. When will we change?

So maybe, really for the first time, I am seeing irony in those opening words of v30. "At that time" - given that Jesus himself didn't know when, (v36). Indeed, the very question 'when will the end come', makes me realise this whole chapter demands the world's attention. Serve the ends of 'goodness', it warns. Ask yourselves: Do you want the world to 'end'? If humanity as a whole embraced Jesus' teaching, why would it end?

"Don't be alarmed. Rumours will circulate; wars will happen", Jesus says, "before the end" (v6). Can we see: The more violence, corruption, and wickedness there is (see Genesis 6:11), the closer the end will be (v12)? How evident that now seems, and how sad. And yet, if we stand fast (in faith) until then, ignoring the

promises of false prophets, we can rely upon God's promise to keep us safe. What more could we ask? God is good. But realise these verses invite *discomfort*, provoke action.

It's not difficult to see why people find the 'last days' intriguing. The description Matthew gives us is close to the one Paul employs in his first letter to Thessalonians (4:16-17). But whilst Matthew rejects speculation, writing only: "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, Paul cannot resist adding; and *'the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are still alive and are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.'*"

But, as we see, detail is not the point. Of more concern to Jesus is how we respond to events, our state of preparedness, the strength of our faith and the power of our witness. Because, if humanity continues unchecked on its present course, an end is inevitable. Jesus is putting the lofty ideals of a final judgment and the spectre of retribution in life after death into a context his disciples will understand. His sense that time and date are irrelevant just underlines the looming threat. He wants us to act now. He cares about us. We are hearing honest love talk.

There has been no shortage of 'signs' concerning Jesus. So, when 'the sign of the Son of Man' appears in the sky, v30a, will that sign go unnoticed too? Jesus' prophecy that "the earth will mourn", carries a clear inference that everyone then alive *will* realise who he is - and humanity *will* finally acknowledge its mistake. The prophet Zechariah foretells (12:10) that the people will look at him whom they pierced. They will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and weep bitterly for him as one weeps for a firstborn." He means Jews will mourn. But, in Paul's letter to Romans, they are told Jesus' promise to save the faithful applies to everyone, not just Jews. All will grieve; but we are left wondering will it be tears of love, or tears of guilt and fear?

So what has Matthew given us?

Well, he's presented worldly events from Jesus' uniquely eternal perspective. Jesus sees where the world is headed. He has foreseen his violent 'death', and knows it will leave the gates to destruction wide open (v21]. He must call his followers into action. Coming soon with great symbolism, will be the destruction of Jerusalem's Temple to God (v2).

To the violent, corrupt, and wicked, God's commands and Jesus teaching mean nothing. They will all be called to account (as Genesis says they were in the time of Noah). Speaking out on behalf of the good in humanity, Jesus will tell them: "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I

needed clothes and you did not clothe me. I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me”, (v 40-42).

There are counterpoint echoes here of Jesus words in John 14:22-23 where Jesus says: “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will make our home with him.” And, somehow - by shining a light on these things - Matthew has revealed something of how and why we should expect the world as we know it to come to an end. As Brian Pritchard reminded us three weeks ago, God will not be mocked!

Second Sunday before Advent: Heavenly Father, whose blessed Son was revealed to destroy the works of the devil and to make us the children of God and heirs of eternal life: grant that we, having this hope, may purify ourselves even as he is pure; that when he shall appear in power and great glory we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Lord’s Prayer: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. **Amen.**

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. ‘The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.’ (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

The Notices: We are now holding services in the building on Sundays at 8am and 9.30am, and are live streaming the 9.30 service. This Paper Service will continue for the moment and is generally available the week after the service.

- Coffee and Questions: Nov. 22nd & Jan 24th at 11am, in Church Hall.
- Christmas Party for Chatters, Bowlers and Coffee & Questioners: Wed. Dec 20th at 2pm, Church Hall and Church.
- 2024: Tea and Chat & Bowls: Wed. Jan 17th at 2pm, Church Hall and Church.
- Carol Services 5pm and 7pm December 17th.
- Tea and Praise: TBA.
- COGS Tots: 2nd Mondays.
- COGS Tinytots: Monday mornings.