

No Thing Lasts Pentecost 25 – 14th November 2010

Readings:

Luke 21: 9-14 & Isaiah 65: 17-25

Loving Creator, speak your word into our weary world and make all things new. Guide us to live into the vision of your infinite realm of peace and justice, so that all your creatures may live in the harmony you intend.

AMEN.

Do you like History? I love it, so let me read you from the Launceston Examiner dated Saturday 29th February 1868. Under the banner "Opening of the Church at Launceston" the following words appeared:

It having been found that the places of worship of the Wesleyan congregation in Launceston were inadequate to their requirements, a new church was contemplated some two years back. The site determined upon was a piece of ground adjoining the Patterson Street Chapel upon which the Sunday School stood, together with some land adjoining which was purchased; and about eighteen months ago the foundation stone of the new Wesleyan Church was laid by John Crookes Esq."

The article goes on to describe this magnificent edifice and gives measurements and costings for all the fittings. The total expenditure for this magnificent edifice amounted to £6,788 but at the time of the opening they were £1,302.17.6 short! So on the Monday after the opening, 500 souls gathered in the old church for tea and the whole of the shortfall was met on the night!

Ah! Those were the days!

But let me now transport you 142 years into the future away from that heady night of faith and fellowship - to Pilgrim Uniting Church 2010, now a pilgrimage stop for tourists, who are wont to stop and gaze and exclaim what a magnificent old church we have.

And, having experienced the thrill of time-travel, I now want you to use your imagination. Imagine that as we show our tourist around, there is another person in the church, in the shadows with the tourists and he is muttering to himself.

We hear him say, "Go ahead and boast, but this church that you think is so great, well the days are coming when there will not be on brick left standing on another on this spot." And we recognize the words of Jesus from our Gospel.

So let's time travel again, this time back 2000 years to the temple in Jerusalem And there is Jesus again and he's listening to others commenting on the wonder that was the Second Temple.

Well there are times when you wish Jesus would just keep his mouth shut. I'm sure that's how his disciples must have felt, for it gets him and them into so much trouble. Take this

gospel reading. Look at Jesus' outrageous behaviour. He's eavesdropping again - overhears some other tourist saying how magnificent the Temple in Jerusalem is. And instead of staying quiet or nodding politely as we would do, he uses the comments to launch himself into a sermon about how impermanent the Temple really is. Tells all and sundry that it won't be standing for much longer. Not a stone left standing upon a stone. And of course he was right. By the time Luke writes his Gospel, forty years later the temple has been totally destroyed. But did he have to go and tell everyone.

But Jesus is making a serious point here, something that is so important for our living. It's about suffering, the suffering of impermanence. You see, we all think and hope and live as if things will never change. We become attached to things.

We even become attached to people and live our lives as if things will never change. But Jesus, in predicting the destruction of the Temple, is only stating what is obvious. Nothing in this world is forever.

But we pretend to ourselves that this is not true, and in the pretence we suffer. Take my new car. It's a few months old, we buy it and I'm so happy - I have a new car, everything works in it. It's so shiny. People tell me how good it looks and I bask in its reflective glory. But the thrill doesn't last - it never does. Three weeks after I purchase it - the first serious dent - and I anguish over it. Nothing lasts. Change is a central feature of life. It can be exhilarating, frightening, exhausting, or relieving. It can spark sadness or happiness, resistance or grasping.

But it is always there, and Jesus in his living was pointing beyond our dependence on physical possessions - whether they be a new car or a Temple. The only thing that lasts is a relationship with the One who Jesus constantly points - the Creator. When Jesus talks about losing your life to gain life, that's what he means; the only thing that lives for ever is our relationship with God. And that's what gets us through the bad times of suffering. Suffering that is part and parcel of a world of impermanence.

So in our gospel reading Jesus talks about the end times - about how his followers can survive them. He takes for granted that end times are coming. They are always coming, given the impermanence of this world. So Jesus urges his followers to use the time of suffering to move closer to God, to depend on the only thing that lasts, our relationship with the eternal God. And he promises them new life. In the midst of suffering "not a hair on your head will perish!" he says.

As a minister, I come in contact with many endings, and many people who feel that they are going through the end times.

- A marriage ends after 20 years and for those involved it is as if their world has come to an end. The end is nigh.

- A secure job suddenly evaporates into thin air. We are told our working life is over. The end is nigh.

- A body seems to be falling apart at the seams as we suffer one illness after another and we feel our age. The end is nigh.

-A business and a reputation are in financial ruin and we feel we are worth nothing. The

end is nigh.

- A young child tragically dies before she has a chance to live and we stand around looking lost. What's the world coming to? The end is nigh.

I could go on, but I won't because I want to make the strong point that is contained in all our readings today, and that is that for every end time with God, there is a new beginning.

In fact our God is a God of new beginnings for no **thing** lasts in this world!

And that's what our Old Testament reading is about. The Hebrew people having lost everything, having been made refugees when they were forced into exile, have returned to their promised land to start all over again. They were discouraged - knew what end times meant. How difficult it is to start all over again. So the writer of Isaiah 65 gives them hope. New heavens and a new earth no less.

That's why these readings are so important - not because of the end times they foreshadow but because of the hope they promise in a world of impermanence. They give us the hope that for every ending there is a new beginning - God's new beginning. They point to a God who through Jesus Christ used an ending - the death of Jesus Christ - to create a new beginning.

The end is nigh. But the assurance from our Scriptures this morning is that no matter what the ending, our God is there to walk with us to a new beginning, a new life. Divorce, redundancy, ill health, financial ruin, even death, can never have the last word if we claim the name of Christ.

So as you look around this church building, don't think it'll last, but know what will always last is the Spirit of Christ pointing us always to a new heaven and a new earth, where "the wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion shall eat straw with the ox."

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