

Pentecost 26 2024 All Souls' **THE HOPE OF JUSTICE AND PEACE** dtw

Read all about it! Read all about it! FLICKERING CANDLE OF HOPE... 'The crass materialism of yet another Christmas Gold Rush, apparently unhindered by the financial woes of many or war and terror, assaults the people of western democracies near the end of the year of our Lord, two thousand and twenty-four. Millions have even been encouraged to spend, spend, spend and Black Friday therapy is the go! Meanwhile, Christians everywhere have been called to a sober and vigilant preparation for Christ in acknowledgement of something they describe as a fundamental mystery of their faith: Christ will come again. It turns out that there is still hope for a sad and sorry world if Christians could be convinced to proclaim and live the true meaning of Christmas and apparently, true life itself, which is the hope of justice and righteousness for earth proclaimed by that same Carpenter, Jesus of Nazareth, all those centuries ago.' All this and much more in the latest edition of my imaginary newspaper or broadcast.

The build up to Advent calls us to probe the deep issues. In our Gospel today, Christ warns, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down...nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom... this is but the beginning of the birthpangs." (Mark 13.2, 8). The Song of Hannah, an ancient Hebrew preview to the Song of Mary, the Magnificat, in Luke foretells the upside - down Kingdom of freedom and justice: 'the bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. Those who were full now search for bread: but those who were hungry are well fed...You raise up the poor from the dust: and lift the needy from the ash heap.' Well, that is a bit much to digest with grandchildren's speech nights just around the corner, a big shopping list and 50 Christmas cards still to write. (or maybe you've switched to e-cards?!)

When Jesus wanted to warn his disciples about what lay ahead, he did not use the language of modern newspaper reporting, but 'apocalyptic' language – the picture language of his own times. The distresses foretold in today's Gospel were actual events which culminated in the destruction of the Temple and the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD. Jesus warned that the suffering would be horrific, but he is calling his followers to seek their security and safety in God's redemption. The words complement those of Isaiah who laments Israel's sin and apostasy and cries to Yahweh, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence..." But then Isaiah recalls the true purpose of this chosen people, "Yet, O Yahweh, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand" (Isa 64.1,8) In other words, do with us what you will, restore our mission as your people. And, back to the Gospel, the

purpose of Jesus' coming is to empower his followers to be on the lookout with the armour of justice and righteousness for all and, with his love, to reach out into the worst situations that humanity can endure, bringing hope from despair, light from darkness.

Different life situations call out different degrees of hope from us. When life is going well and we are secure in our home relationships and daily work, we may coast along and calmly plan for the future. However, when the framework of our daily lives is severely shaken, we desperately need to find hope in ourselves, in other people, in God. Hope is strengthened by the desire for change and new resolve. Where life is quite comfortable and we feel fairly satisfied about our lot, the challenges are small, the desire for change minimal. Consider, by contrast, the position of those whose daily life experience is one of hunger, poverty, terror or oppression. Here is an extremity of hope - hope for freedom – for survival – for justice. The promises of the Gospel then become infinitely precious. The old African proverb rings so true: 'The hungry are more blessed in the presence of a banquet than the well fed.' The uncomfortable Grace at meals rightly disturbs: 'May the hungry be fed and the fed be hungry for truth and justice until together we sit down at the Great Banquet Hall of the Kingdom' The Christmas Bowl, Tear Fund and other agencies of care are also important instruments by which, at this time of the year, often described as the 'silly season', we can demonstrate our longing for a new heaven and a new earth.

You can give everything from goats to schoolrooms, to fresh water supplies. I have a friend who promotes in his church these different kinds of amazing life-giving Christmas presents, (gifts to the Christ in disguise) to give away to people we may never meet, instead of the usual Myers and Harvey Norman vouchers; and when he does he sometimes says, "It's not your birthday, get over it!" You can still give your friend or loved one a card letting them know that you just purchased a well or a goat in their name. The foot spa you gave them last year is probably collecting dust anyway.

May Hannah and the raw Gospel shock us back to our true mission as the disciples of the One who was born into poverty in a crude stable manger to establish his reign of Justice, Peace and Love. And as we prepare at this Church to receive 'Prophets in our Midst' this coming Advent, let us join in the radical call to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable. Amen