

## SERMON FOR ANG.COMBINED SERVICE,ST.JOHNS,13/11/22

TEXT: LUKE 21: 5-19

RECENTLY, WE VISITED AN OLD FRIEND IN SYDNEY. WHEN THE CONVERSATION TOUCHED ON THE FLOODS, THE ERRATIC CLIMATE, THE DROUGHT AND FAMINE IN THE HORN OF AFRICA, OUR DEAR FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN FRIEND DECLARED: " WE ARE IN THE LAST DAYS". THIS DEFINITIVE STATEMENT ECHOED WHAT I AM SURE WOULD HAVE BEEN THE WORDS OF ANOTHER FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN, MY MOTHER, MARY, HAD SHE BEEN ALIVE TODAY.

WHILST IT IS POSSIBLE TO READ THE PASSAGE FROM LUKE AS A GUIDE BOOK FOR PREDICTING THE END TIME, THE PASSAGE'S MAJOR CONCERN IS ENCOURAGING THE FAITHFUL DURING A TIME OF GREAT SUFFERING. APOCALYPTIC LANGUAGE, AS IS FEATURED IN THE PASSAGE, AIMS TO REASSURE THE FAITHFUL THAT PRESENT EVIL WILL BE OVERCOME, THAT GOD WILL VINDICATE THEM IN THE END.

JESUS CAUTIONS HIS HEARERS ABOUT BEING TOO HASTY IN PREDICTING THE END TIME, "(V8) BEWARE YOU ARE NOT LEAD ASTRAY..."(V9)... THE END WILL NOT FOLLOW IMMEDIATELY". AS BRENDAN BYRNE SAYS IN HIS COMMENTARY ON LUKE, 'THE HOSPITALITY OF GOD', THE PASSAGE'S MESSAGE IS: THE END WILL COME BUT NOT YET.

IN THE MEANTIME, JESUS' WORDS AND WISDOM WILL SUSTAIN THE FAITHFUL IN TOUGH TIMES. THEY ARE TO USE THE OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY, THEY ARE TO PERSERVERE. AND, BY FAITHFUL PERSERVERENCE, THEY WILL GAIN LIFE .

WHEN READING THE PASSAGE'S OPENING VERSES ABOUT THE TEMPLE'S DESTRUCTION, I COULDN'T HELP THINKING HOW UPSET I WOULD BE TO SEE OUR BEAUTIFUL CHURCHES DESTROYED: I LOVE THE LEONARD FRENCH WINDOW AT CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION, THE BEAUTIFUL BLUESTONE BUILDING THAT IS ST.PAUL'S AND, ALMOST EVERYTHING ABOUT ST.JOHN'S, THOUGH POSSIBLY NOT ALL OF THE STAIN GLASS WINDOWS!

HOWEVER, THE GENERAL COMMUNITY, IF THEIR ABSENCE IS ANY INDICATION, DO NOT LOVE THESE BUILDINGS THE WAY WE DO. FOR WHATEVER REASON, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MESSY CHURCH, THEY DO NOT WANT TO DO CHURCH IN ANY ONE OF OUR BEAUTIFUL BUILDINGS.

PERHAPS THAT IS THE END WE SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT, RATHER THAN END TIME PREDICTIONS.

AFTERALL, ITS HARDLY FAIR TO EXPECT ETHAN TO SHOULDER THE FULL BURDEN OF THE FAITH MANTLE WHEN WE HAVE ALL GONE TO OUR HEAVENLY RESTING PLACE.

ONE OF THE THINGS I MOST LOVE ABOUT THIS PARISH IS OUR EXTENSIVE COMMUNITY OUTREACH. FOR AN OLDER PARISH INCREASINGLY STRUGGLING WITH HEALTH ISSUES, EXPERIENCING TOUGH TIMES, WE DO A LOT! I WOULDN'T WANT TO SUGGEST THAT WE DO MORE BUT RATHER, WE CONTINUE TO CONSIDER DOING SOME THINGS DIFFERENTLY WITHIN OUR MANY CURRENT OUTREACH ACTIVITIES, SOME DIFFERENT WAYS OF USING OUR "OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY" AS VERSE 13 EXPRESSES IT. OF COURSE, THIS HAS ALREADY BEGUN WITH THE MESSY CHURCH REBOOT AND CONSIDERATION OF A MULTI-PURPOSE FACILITY AT GISBORNE.

I CERTAINLY DON'T PRESUME TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS BUT HERE ARE A FEW MORE SUGGESTIONS: (STAY TUNED FOR YET A FEW MORE IN OTHER BUSINESS AT OUR AGM!) IF OUR BUILDINGS ARE A STUMBLING BLOCK, PERHAPS WE NEED TO CONSIDER HOLDING WORSHIP AND OTHER EVENTS IN THE OUTDOORS MORE OFTEN, BEING MORE VISIBLE TO THE GENERAL COMMUNITY, AS WITH LAST YEAR'S NATIVITY PLAY AT ST.JOHN'S AND LAST AND THIS YEAR'S FAIR. OR, WE COULD, ERECT A LARGE BOARD OUTSIDE OUR CHURCHES, AS ONE AMERICAN CONGREGATION DID, INVITING PEOPLE TO OFFER PRAYER REQUESTS WHICH WILL BE PRAYED FOR AT WORSHIP. NO PERMANENT MARKERS TO BE USED FOR OBVIOUS REASONS!!!

WE COULD ENCOURAGE MORE PARTICIPATION IN SOME OF OUR PARISH GROUPS BY THOSE ON THE CHURCH FRINGE OR IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY AS A SAFE, SIDEWAYS INTRODUCTION TO CHURCH LIFE, REMINISCENT OF THE '50'S MODEL OF CHURCH CONNECTION. THE OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY CAN TAKE MANY FORMS.

MAY GOD HELP US TO PERSERVERE IN TOUGH TIMES AND SO GAIN LIFE.

THE LORD BE WITH YOU.