

He who has promised is faithful

The sermon given at the Parish Communion Service on 18 November 2018 by the Associate Vicar, the Revd. Wendy Wales, in Beverley Minster.

Hebrews 10: 11 - 14, 19 – 25; Mark 13:1-8

So, imagine the unthinkable with me for a moment....we arrive for church next Sunday and overnight a sink hole has opened up and swallowed the Minster- there is nothing left.

It really is unimaginable....but stay with me, just for a moment...beyond the loss of such an incredible piece of history and the loss of so many beautiful treasures...I wonder what it would do to your faith?

Maybe it wouldn't bother you at all, you'd happily head somewhere new to worship, or you'd continue to worship with your friends or small group. But, maybe your faith is inextricably linked here- my absolute pleasure was to meet XXX who at 101 years old has probably been attending the longest, but I know that many have their most significant life events and stories tied up here.

The Minster is solid, secure, a place of sanctuary. I wonder what else in your life gives you security? Perhaps your marriage, your home, your job, your life experiences, the savings you have in the bank, your children or grandchildren?

The disciples had very little material security- what they did have, they had left behind in order to follow Jesus, a Jew of the highest order. In our gospel reading we heard that they had been to worship in the temple- the Minster of their day....a place of solid security. The disciples are impressed...pointing out the large stones and a size of the building....not expecting Jesus' reply, as shocking as the start to my talk this morning...

'Not one stone will be left, all will be thrown down'.

And the news doesn't get any better....

... For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

These themes are tough, but hugely relevant for our world today.

Most of us would have spent time last week in remembrance. Remembering in particular 100 years since the end of THE Great War, the war to end all wars- to ensure peace and stability forever. The reconciliation of nations. Tragically, just over 20 years later the second world war began- the roots of division tied into the earlier conflict, compounded by imperialism, austerity and the pursuit of power.

Conflicts around the world continue, along with deep divisions in our own country. Uncertainty over Brexit, allegations of anti-semitism and the rise of the extreme-right. Last week 3 people were arrested for being part of a neo-fascist group, naming their child Adolf and seeking to stir up racial hatred, celebrating violence.

Gun crime in America and knife crime in London are on the increase. The refugee crisis has a global impact. The Pakistani Christian woman Asia Bibi appealed for sanctuary in Britain after she was freed after 8 years on death row. Her appeal was turned down for fear it would prompt unrest and attacks on embassies.... The war in Yemen is now headline news and it is painful viewing- Yemen has the highest level of famine in the world with over 20 million people in need.

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

And of course, we all sit here deeply aware of the fragility in our own lives. We are widows and widowers, separated and divorced, we have lost parents, children and friends, we have seen war and experienced conflict- we know the impact of financial hardship, we struggle to find work, we worry about the results of medical tests, we've lived the pain of broken friendships, we take the pills to keep the mental health struggles under control....

Our world is fragile. Our lives are fragile- which is why our reading from Hebrews is so important. It offers us hope, it helps us move forward with confidence.

'when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, "he sat down at the right hand of God,"- For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

Jesus came to a world of power, status and material gain as a carpenter. Born into poverty, without status, wealth or a career portfolio. A refugee without a permanent home, although totally at home in the Synagogue- speaking truth to power. He challenged the mentality of empirical Rome, upset the ruling religious leaders and made outrageous statements about the destruction of both the temple and his own body.

Jesus' life, death and resurrection heralded a totally new way of living and understanding- which he called the kingdom of God. In Jesus' kingdom normal lines of division on the basis of race, nationality, power, skin colour or religion are abolished. Power and status are inverted- the first shall be last and the last first. Deep reconciliation with self, others and God are the goal.

If we choose to enter into Jesus death and resurrection we become kingdom people and our lives too become part of seeing his kingdom here on earth- we are reminded of this every time we pray the Lord's Prayer- thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Following Jesus, seeking his kingdom here on earth means working and praying to see justice, reconciliation and hope brought to each and every situation we find ourselves in or for which our heart breaks with God in our deeply unjust world. Since I've been here I've already had the privilege of hearing stories of peoples' life-long commitment- to see God's kingdom come in the lives of disadvantaged children, in bringing hope for the lonely and depressed, in caring for those in the last days of their lives, seeking integrity in international relationships, seeking safety and justice on our streets, offering skilled medical practice, teaching and discipling young people, praying for parts of the world that are in crisis, making sure the Minster doesn't fall down...and I know I've only heard a fraction of the ways we are a kingdom people.

But, we can't do it alone. We might be here this morning feeling broken or fragile or just plain exhausted...we perhaps think we have nothing to give and aren't a significant part of God's Kingdom.

Our reading in Hebrews again reminds us that we can come to Jesus (the great priest) at any time and be renewed- with faith in our hearts, our consciences cleaned, our bodies valued and restored...

...he who has promised, is faithful.

God is faithful. He is the ultimate stability. The Minster hasn't fallen down- but our world and our lives are fragile...but God is faithful- and he gives us each other to love, support and encourage us on the journey: sometimes a kind word or listening ear is the greatest Kingdom act someone can imagine.

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds,²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

There are people who would love to pray with you this morning during communion, we have many smaller groups where you can discuss and grow in your faith, there are social settings where you can develop trusted friendships and share stories. We have a pastoral team who will phone, visit, pray and listen. Please do contact the office look on the website, or speak to someone over tea at the end of the service if you'd like to find out more.

As we receive bread and wine together shortly,

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.

Hebrews 10

¹¹ And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ^[e] had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, “he sat down at the right hand of God,” ¹³ and since then has been waiting “until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.” ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

¹⁹ Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Mark 13:1-8

The Destruction of the Temple Foretold

13 As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” ² Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

³ When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” ⁵ Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’^[a] and they will lead many astray. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.