

Luke 12.32-40 Pentecost 9

Today's Gospel is another ripper as we would say. Although as I was writing this I thought to myself I am preaching to the faithful not to those who first followed Jesus. Luke's Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem. As he journeys the crowds are intrigued, interested and continue to follow him. Who is this man. He answers their questions with parables pointing them to the message of the Kingdom of God. Like last week where Luke's Jesus speaks about the danger of accumulating wealth and possessions to store up treasures for ourselves including a secure future, he now speaks about the final meeting with our Lord. The Gospel readings over the past few weeks are part of a long discourse where Jesus shows he is no meek and mild ambassador for the kingdom of God. Included is not only that we take stock but also live out our lives as though time is running out. Luke gave us pointed warnings against greed and the expectation that by material possessions one can secure the future in last week's Gospel. Remember Luke, who is himself not

poor, is only too aware of the temptations to accumulate wealth and retain his status. His community is made up of people from many different walks of life and includes those who are prosperous. Sadly, I suggest that there are some forms of Christianity today, spoken about and preached, that say to follow Jesus is all about prosperity and being right with God. It is what I call the "Prosperity Gospel". Our future if we accept Jesus as our saviour, all will be right. A former Prime Minister who is entitled to his faith perspective, was one that suggested that we only have to work hard to be rewarded and he appeared oblivious, as do many others, yet judgemental for whatever reason, that those in our community, the modern-day lepers, the unemployed, the aged pensioner, those with mental health issues and those who are different are responsible for their own plight. {Remember Robo Debt} To blame and to castigate those who are disadvantaged, and other prophetic voices, such as those who demand an end to fossil fuels being used for energy are further examples of those who are often ridiculed and rejected for their prophetic witness, often all in the name of profits for multi nationals.

In our reading from the prophet Isaiah, the prophet speaks to Judah and Jerusalem with the call to repentance. God has been watching what they say and do. They have been giving lip service only, to their responsibilities to care for the orphan, the widow and the outcast. Their prayers give only lip service. Their sacrifices superficial, and their festivals lack depth. The outcomes have been only superficial for the community and acts of evil are committed. They do not seek after justice and the most marginalized abandoned. Offering prayers and words of comfort are not sufficient. Actions speak louder than words.

In speaking these words, as I said at the beginning, I feel that I am only speaking to the converted.

You may ask, how much have we learned? When we listen do we hear the cries of God through the oppressed, those killed in recent gun shootings in the United States, through those who suffer as a result of despots including the people of Gaza and the Ukraine and when sacred places are desecrated? When we hear political and corporate leaders speak words that destroy the lives of innocent people or seek to silence any challenge to their words and actions, what have we

leant. last week we recalled the bombings of Hiroshima and Narasaki. I recall the words of a catholic priest when challenged why God allowed the events of 9/11 to happen in the US saying that God was present in the depth of the destruction, pain and suffering. So often we only call upon God when something we value or is important is affected by evil acts.

Travelling through Canada a few years ago I purchased a sticker that has the words. "Jesus is coming look busy". It sent a laugh through all of us. But it is also a reminder that our faith needs to be more than just looking busy doing religious work that fails to demonstrate the characteristics of God and the Kingdom he calls us to work for and with. It requires more than prayer and doing the right things. William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury during World War 2 wrote," The Church is the only cooperative society in the world that exists for the benefit of its non-members". They are profound words. A reminder that we in the Church have a deeper quest than most humanitarian groups and clubs. Another Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams wrote, "The Christian Faith is not a matter of vague philosophy but of unremitting

challenge to what we think we know about human beings and their destiny". I would add remaining silent and offering prayer alone allows evil to continue and the atrocities of our time to flourish.

Today's Christians are challenged not to give up, not to relax just because they think or believe all will be well if they are followers of Jesus. The presence of God in the world does not take away our responsibility.

Jesus offers words of encouragement in today's Gospel with a challenge to be ready and not to take all without shared responsibility and readiness.

As we prepare in this parish for the calling of a new parish priest, let us together be a people of hope and transformation, conscious of the past in its many dimensions, aware of God's continuing presence with us and knowing we are not alone in our struggles and that God stands with us affirming our mission to build God's kingdom in this time for our times .

Amen