

St Bartholomew's Burnley
16th November 2025, 23rd after Pentecost.
Luke 21:5-19

Today's Gospel passage continues the theme that we have been exploring through Luke's Gospel for the past few weeks. It is probably the most difficult part of the Gospel for us today to comprehend as it has been throughout the ages. It challenges us to rethink our understanding of the term "kingdom of God" and how we think or speculate about the future of the church and more importantly Christianity. It embraces questions of climate change, social cohesion, multiculturalism and the future of the planet. It raises the question of "is there an end time" and will God destroy what God has created for our failures to love as he has loved us.

The world we experience today, like the Church, has changed and continues to change and face new challenges that are both enriching of the human person but also confusing, in some places terrifying and at times the global community seems out of control. The enriching changes do not impact equally on everyone, and the statistics show us that the rich and powerful remain equally as strong while millions of others find little solace in the advancements of our day, in health, education, standard of living and life span.

At the same time the world around us and at home appears very uneasy, anxious, with itself verging on collapse or takeover in some places by a more powerful political forces particularly extreme right group espousing anti immigration policies, denial of climate change, anti-vaccinations and indigenous reforms. Listening to a pod cast this week on the threats to our democracy from the influence of social media and the lack of independent mainstream journalism not pursuing a particular political line and remaining independent and objective is recognized as a major threat to our future, or as Judi reminds me, we no longer teach history. We are in danger of not learning from past mistakes. People across the globe in previously stable democracies are asking serious questions about the integrity and honesty of the political process of which they are part while appearing to have forgotten history and turning to political parties advocating policies of race, violence, ideology, division and being inward looking.

Likewise, I suggest we people of faith and in the Church have seen better days in our times. We have been seen wanting and adrift, divided, lacking acceptance and respect when we differ and at times less than rational. It appears that so often we deny the advances in medicine and science as they impact on our understanding of what it means to be human preferring to limit our understanding of scripture to past contexts and experiences.

Leadership at the highest levels is facing challenges to their style, voice, and past actions. In the face of declining membership and financial challenges some despair at our churches' future with the danger that we become inward looking and want quick fixes alongside viewpoints that disrespect those who differ from us on matters of theology and the reading of scripture. This is not to suggest that there are not good and positive things happening in some places in both our churches and the broader community but the challenges the church faces are not too similar to that experienced by our political leaders and the lack of trust in them and many of our professions.

Government has become more complex whoever maybe in power while journalists are quick with easy solutions to complex challenges. Declining rural populations, an ageing population, the growth of technology, global population movements, indigenous matters, suburban growth to name a few. How to respond to these issues is challenging and require disciplined and compassionate thinking that require new ways of thinking and sharing the Good news of Christ. There is urgency in our churches for a renaissance in leadership styles, governance structures to ensure accountability at the highest levels, a broader definition of Church to include parish life, agencies and schools. There is a case for shared leadership across the Churches whole life.

So, what does today's Gospel have to say to us today at St Barts today in the contexts I have described. It is first not someone else's problem like the clergy or the bishops alone.

Likewise, in today's Gospel the people who pointed out the Jerusalem temple to Jesus were overawed. Everyone marvelled at the grandeur of the building. His disciples of course who were not city dwellers would probably have never seen such a magnificent building. The response of Jesus to their claim must then have come as a bit of a shock. You can hear them saying among themselves, "Who does he think he is talking about the Temple's destruction? Probably if we expressed views that our St Paul's Cathedral was to be destroyed, or St Barts or the Shrine of Remembrance for that matter we also would be aghast.

Although I began this address with words reflecting anxiety and challenge this Gospel is not about the end of the world rather it challenges us to think about seriously the challenges of our times and to broaden our understanding of the "words Kingdom of God:"

We would rather not hear that moths destroy, and rust consumes and that our possessions are short lived and temporary. Even our mortality is a scary thing and to talk of an end time is scary also. We do not want to lose our material status. As people of faith however there is more to living and proclaiming the Kingdom or reign of God than magnificent structures or material possessions. Like the times in which the Gospel was written our times of unrest among the crowds and

the threats to our environments can be frightening. As I have said many of us are deeply concerned about the present and the future while others seem disinterested and going with the crowd. Despite these we encounter we experience a world that is still searching for hope and our mission remains as important today as at any other time in history.

I believe and affirm that many of the Church's values that have been central to the building of community remain as relevant as at any time in history. We have something to offer that is life giving and it is more than material possessions, and the challenge for us is to not loose heart and remain passionate. Not as bullies or avengers but with an open heart. It takes courage to hear what God maybe saying to the church from outside its structures. As with the first disciples it takes endurance and faith to see Christ in the midst of our times. He like us experiences the pain of our times. So rather than loosing heart Luke's Jesus reminds us not to be led astray, nor to place our hope in things that will disappear from sight but rather embrace the values of God's love as enduring, values that liberate and reassures of God's faithfulness.

We do not know precisely what tomorrow may bring but we do know God calls us to love our neighbour as self and to work for a just and sustainable creation. It is a call to be patient, open to the new, faithful, supportive and reflective. This is the presence of the Kingdom of God within us all that we are called to share and proclaim.

When we read today's Gospel Jesus drops the challenge into the hands of his followers before setting his face towards Jerusalem. It is the challenge to create peace on earth and justice for all of God's creation. So buckle your seat belts good people of God, the good people of St Bartholomews because Advent is around the corner and Jesus is at the steering wheel and the future may not always be smooth.

Amen