



Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

The Second Sunday before Advent Remembrance Sunday

readings, [Malachi 4.1-2a](#), [2 Thessalonians 3.6-13](#), [Luke 21.5-19](#)

13 November 2022

Our Old Testament and Gospel readings today are both one way or another about the end time. Both warn of some pretty dire, violent, cataclysmic, events to be endured.

See, the day is coming (says Malachi) burning like an oven,
when all the arrogant and evildoers will be stubble;
the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts,
so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.

And then, in our Gospel reading, Jesus warn of wars, earthquakes, famines plagues; of the faithful being arrested and persecuted, betrayal by relatives and some being put to death.

So - what are we to make of all this stuff about violent endings? Many who heap scorn on those with a religious faith often accuse belief in God as some kind of a crutch to lean on - to make us feel secure and comfortable. Nothing very comfortable about today's readings.

That said, both the Malachi passage and the Gospel reading have redeeming conclusions. Malachi's warnings are tempered by the final sentence in our reading:
For you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall arise, with healing in its wings.

Whatever the historical situation which prompted Malachi to write these words, the message has a timeless quality about it. The warning that the coming day of the Lord spells doom for the arrogant and evildoers, but for those who fear the name of the Lord, that day will mean vindication and salvation: the rising sun of Righteousness with healing in its wings.

Charles Wesley applied these words in the carol 'Hark the herald angels sing' to the birth of Jesus.
Remember:

Hail the heaven born prince of peace,
Hail the sun of righteousness
Light and life to all he brings
risen with healing in his wings.

But in the perspective of Malachi, the positive part (the rising of the sun with healing in its wings) is just as much to do with the coming end as the negative bit (the doom for evildoers). So, although for many Christians down the centuries the last judgement has been about a dire expectation of doom, in much of scripture, especially in the New Testament, despite the dire warnings, the coming day of the Lord is something to be looked forward to - waiting for with earnest desire.

The end of today's gospel, after everything...

You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.

One more thing to unpack before we put some of this back together, is to bear in mind the context for the dire warnings in the gospel reading. The time at which Luke was writing his gospel, around the AD60s was a turbulent period in Judean history rising to a crescendo in the sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD70. Luke was almost certainly interpreting Jesus's warnings about hardships ahead (warnings Jesus no

doubt gave), in the light of current historical events. Violent events were actually taking place at the time. A commentary on the present, as far as Luke was concerned, rather than predictions of events hundreds or thousands of years later. So we need to see the specifics of the gospel warnings more generally in terms of a commentary on the struggle in human history between the forces of good and evil; that we as Christians have no right to expect that everything is just going to get better and better on an ever upward spiral, or that the cause of the Kingdom is going to progress without setbacks - some of them destructive and violent. But, that God's final victory is assured is in no doubt. And for us, it is the resurrection and the assurance of forgiveness which it brings which makes the difference.

The birth pangs of the coming of the kingdom. The reality now, as in the manner of Jesus' life and death, is that the struggle for real peace, justice and reconciliation often brings, in the short term at least - not 'peace and quiet' - but conflict and division. Something we can reflect upon on this Remembrance Sunday when war is raging on the continent of Europe.

Jesus' radical mission proclaiming and demonstrating God's real peace and love brought him into situations where hatred and injustice were exposed and resulted in opposition and violence directed towards himself. Ultimately, it brought him to the cross; but then from the cross to the triumph of resurrection. God's peace is not cheap but costly.

We need to reflect on this and draw strength from it when our faith is challenged and shaken by events - either in the immediacy of our own personal lives or in trying to make some sense of things in the face of terrible happenings in the world today.

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