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**14th November: Proper 28 : Remembrance Sunday Taking Good News out from the Temple Isaiah 65:17-25; Luke 21:5-19**

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## 14<sup>th</sup> November: Proper 28

### Remembrance Sunday

### Taking Good News out from the Temple

*Isaiah 65:17-25; Luke 21:5-19*

**Douglas Stevenson**

Cullen and Deskford

Our Gospel reading begins with the disciples discussing the most ornate building in the land – Herod’s Temple dedicated to Yaweh. A magnificent structure made, in parts, of marble and plates of gold. It was an apt place for worship and meeting. This was a symbol not only of the grandeur of God but also the unshakeable and everlasting presence of the Creator; and yet Jesus used this debate to talk about, ‘things to come’. And the ‘things to come’ did not make pleasant hearing. He prophesised the destruction of the Temple as well as highlighting forthcoming earthquakes, famines, plagues and wars, and as an added extra, stated that the time would come when his friends would be arrested and persecuted. However when this happens, said Jesus, when things are bad and your enemies are plotting against you, then this is the time to tell others of the amazing love of God – to share the Good News! (verse 13).

Today is Remembrance Sunday. Apart from schoolboy scraps I have never been involved in fighting – especially in a war situation. So on a day like this I have to rely on the stories of others. And Remembrance Sunday is a time for sharing the stories of men and women who have had direct experience of warfare. Both my grandfathers and some uncles fought for their country. They are all dead now and I can recall only one story which my paternal grandfather told me as a child. He was a devout Christian and I believe, (because I was told), that he carried his Bible with him everywhere. When he was captured by the Germans in 1943 and became a POW his Bible was taken from him, (this part of the story I got from my granny) but he was determined that he would continue to find time for his devotions and the only place that he could spend alone with his Maker was in the prison’s latrine (and this is the one story he told me about his wartime experiences) – this became for him his Temple. His place of worship. His sanctuary.

We don’t need to visit monasteries and Temples and Cathedrals to find refuge and peace from the big scary world out there. Indeed often we don’t have to travel far at all – we may have a place in our own homes – the sitting-room, or the kitchen where we can go and relax – to sit in our favourite chair and feel the strains and worries of the day drain away. It might not be the house, for some folks it’s the garden or a walk in the hills or the wood – or the local pub – we all have a special place where we can feel at ease. Of course many people see the church building as a retreat – a place to escape to – away from the trials and tribulations of the world. Come here for an hour and spend that time not just in worship but also to take the opportunity to share your worries as well as your joys with God. If that is true – and to a certain extent there is an element of truth in that perception, then you probably don’t like to be disturbed in the sanctuary by the problems of the world and I am more than convinced that you don’t like to be told that we’re not doing enough, or that we don’t care enough or that we don’t give enough.

We gather together to hear about the love of God – we gather together in order to discover something that lifts us, something that encourages us, something that gives us strength for the rest of the week, something that tells us that there is hope for us, and for our families and for the world. In short you want to hear good news.

There are many things that happen in our world that are deeply disturbing – the very things which Jesus talked about in our Gospel readings – wars, famines, earthquakes, tsunamis and I have to confess that I have changed the channel on the TV when I have come across one of those news bulletins that are full of pictures of bombed buildings, bleeding bodies, homeless children and distressed and despairing individuals. These programmes are not boring – I’m

not bored by them. They are deeply disturbing. I have turned off the TV or changed the channel when they come on because I don't want to deal with their images. I want to shut out the pain and avoid the suffering that they reveal. And I have done that because they can suck the hope and the joy out of me – because they leave me feeling privileged and guilty and incredibly spoiled all because I had the good luck to be born in a land that has food, water, and for the most part, peace and good order.

We know that all that pain and misery are out there but it won't go away because we go away from it. The gospel is not found in watching suffering, nor is it found in complaining about how it is with us, rather it is found in doing what we can to alleviate it.

Perhaps you have heard the story about the rabbi and the soap maker who went for a walk together one day. As they walked along the soap maker said to the Rabbi, "What good is religion? Look at all the trouble and misery of the world after thousands of years of teaching about goodness, truth and peace – even after all your prayers and sermons. If religion is good and true, why should we have all this injustice – all this unrest?"

And it is an excellent question – the question that so many of us have asked when we encounter suffering. What good is God - what good is religion, if all this misery and suffering and war continues to exist?

The rabbi said nothing. They continued walking until he noticed a child playing in the gutter.

Then the rabbi said: "Look at that child. You say that soap makes people clean, but look at the dirt on that youngster's face. What good is soap? With all the soap in the world, the child is still filthy. I wonder how effective soap is after all." The soap maker protested, "But, Rabbi, soap can't do any good unless it is used." "Exactly", replied the Rabbi. "And so it is with religion. It is ineffective unless it is applied."

I am not going to tell you all about the wars and death that exists in so many parts of our world today. You

already know that. But what I am going to say is that each of us can do something to help. Actions do make a difference. And that in the long term is what is important - making a difference. In the face of adversity look for the opportunity to tell others who are facing hard moments about the love and goodness and salvation of Jesus. We are not called to preach to them but to tell them our story! And our story should be one of Hope!

We might not be able to stop wars, or famines or plagues but we should be aware that Love does not sit by the wayside, looking at those who suffer or complaining about how bad things are, and making judgements about who or what is to blame. Love leads to involvement - to attempt to heal and help, and wipe away the tears, - to attempt to be like Jesus.

Is it right to go to war or not? I'm convinced that the ultimate desire of all Christians is to experience the state described in Isaiah:

'The Lord says, 'I am making a new earth and new heavens. The events of the past will be completely forgotten...the new Jerusalem I make will be full of joy and her people will be happy.' (Is 65:17-18)

That will be Utopia and even though that might be the ultimate plan of God how can we help to bring it about? The short answer is I don't know because I think there are many diverse ways of accomplishing this. But I do know this. I do know that I am here today, fed, watered and safe because of the sacrifices of past family members and their generation. Our faith should give us real hope that things – however dreadful – can be different. But only if we are awake and attentive and fearless in our loyalty to goodness and truth and freedom for all.

Today let us continue to honour our dead and those who gave so much that when we leave this building we can go into the world proclaiming the Good News of God and bring hope to troubled places and people.

## **21st November: Proper 29**

*Jeremiah 23.1-6, Colossians 1.11-20, Luke 23. 33-4*

### **Jenny Gaffin**

Assistant Curate, St Peter's Parkstone

I need to come clean with you from the outset. I dread preaching on the theme of reconciliation and

forgiveness. I dread it in part because it is so difficult to forgive at times, and therefore hard to practise