

Hope

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Jer: 33: 14-16; Psalm 25: 1-10; 1 Thess 3: 9-13; Luke 21: 25-38

In times of difficulty, we hope for various things.

We hope that the occupation of Iraq will be soon ended and new democratic government be there.

We hope that the Labor party will chose a leader and be loyal so there is an effective opposition.

But apart from praying there is little we can do to influence the situation.

Closer to home —

we hope we will pass our exams if we are students

we hope that the problems we encounter at work will diminish.

we hope that we will be ready for Christmas

we hope we get a holiday

These hopes can become reality by a certain amount of our own efforts.

When you go to the Doctor he/she often says that your blood pressure is up or your cholesterol or sugar level but he/she never says I'm pleased to say that your hopes are up. If hope levels are not up the doctor doesn't give a couple of hope pills and say take two of these each morning and you'll be fine in no time!

Today's theme is hope!

Jeremiah had predicted that the tradition of rule by the descendants of King David would be restored shortly after Jerusalem fell in 586BC. But as the years went on that prediction a hope went on unfulfilled. The Jewish exiles were tempted to abandon hope, to give up on their religion and follow other ways.

Their hope was partly fulfilled in their return from exile, but with the benefit of hindsight we see that its fulfilment was in the coming of Jesus as the True Messiah.

Last week: Jesus the King — but the traditional notion of what a king is hardly applies.

Even Jesus does not CLAIM kingship.

instead his purpose is TRUTH rather than power or greatness.

As we ponder Jesus the king of truth we come today to this gospel where Jesus ponders the future for his people and expresses the hope that his disciples will remain faithful to God in the way that he has taught them even as they face considerable difficulty.

— persecution

— war

— natural disaster

In keeping faith his followers will be agents of the sort of kingdom he has established.

Jesus has spoken about wars between nations, famine and plagues...

but, — before this there will be persecution of his followers

There will be the destruction of Jerusalem and the distress of the nations.

In our reading today, Jesus speaks about "nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves."

This sea which threatens to engulf the world is the same water upon which God's will was imposed at creation. — it represented chaos and evil which is being held at bay but which still needs to be brought under control.

The power of heaven and the heavenly bodies or the gods of Greek and Roman religion — They were regarded by the Jews as angelic beings created by God to preside over the destiny of pagan nations. The shaking of the power of heaven described is NOT the ruin of the physical universe BUT the overthrow of pagan Gods with the imperial supremacy of the Greeks and Romans for whereas these sound like negative and destructive events they are really images of God's victory over

1. Creation
2. The powerful gentile nations which dominated.

That is why the next words are about seeing the "Son of Man" coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

—

We identify Jesus with the Son of Man but the Son of Man was an image of the agents of god's rule from history —

The Son of Man appears in the book of Daniel and would have been a familiar image to Jesus' followers. The question is did Jesus see himself as The Son of Man or did he think of another?

Quite clearly the early Christians came to identify Jesus as the Son of Man, the one of human appearance who was also the agent of God.

The historic idea of the Son of Man was linked with God's victory and so Jesus can say:

v28: "Now when these things take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

In the midst of all that would happen, Jesus points them to God's Actions to save. Have HOPE in God!

The parable of the fig tree is about reading the signs and being ready for the Lord's return and/or the disaster about to come on Jerusalem.

Readiness is again counselled by Jesus so that that day should not catch them by surprise but through alertness and prayer be ready to escape all these things. ie the disastrous effect of the destruction of Jerusalem // but then to stand before the Son of Man. They were to pray to withstand the preliminary trials and tribulation but to be ready to enter finally into God's kingdom.

The early Christians obviously believed in the return of Christ **soon**. [1Thess 3]

The second part of Paul's message today points to the (past) teaching of Jesus brought to life by the (current) presence of Christ among his people.

One of the greatest difficulties faced by God's people in the world today is HIV-AIDS. God calls us to have hope and to give hope to the world through the CHRISTMAS BOWL APPEAL.