

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : June 20th, 2021
“3rd Sunday After Trinity ”

Storms – they are often dramatic and sudden; they can be frightening and life-threatening; in their wake they can often leave destruction and a feeling both of helplessness and hopelessness.

In Mark’s Gospel today we read the dramatic story of the sudden storm that swept Lake Galilee, a lake which would have been very familiar to the local fishermen. Some of you will have been in a boat on that lake – it’s dramatic and beautiful and still. Yet it is also notorious for the winds that can suddenly whip up the water. Why did that trip almost end in disaster? Perhaps someone forgot to check the weather forecast? Perhaps they were too wrapped up in their new leader to imagine that they might be at any risk on that deceptively tranquil stretch of water? Is this story a helpful one for us today? True, our lives may be remote from storms on lakes. Yet perhaps we can all recognize the screams of terror of the disciples and those in the other boats. One way or another, perhaps at certain times in our lives, we can see ourselves in the boat with Jesus. He shares the same space as us in the middle of this sudden storm. But while we are terrified, he is serene. He seems to be anchored in a way that not even the cruel sea can sweep away. And so, in ways that will be different for each of us, Jesus of Nazareth can often take away the power and terror of the storm.

‘Please believe these days will pass...’

That’s not a quote from a Bishop or a Government Minister – it is from the amazing art installation currently in Southwark Cathedral – there till 23 July. Mark Titchner’s monumental installation at the High Altar called ‘Please believe these days will pass’ is a stark reminder that we need to look beyond these islands to a world still suffering. His Please Believe These Days Will Pass artwork appeared on posters and billboards across the country during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic and was widely shared on social media. He writes: “I had no idea then how this artwork (the size of three billboards) would connect itself to the terrible days that followed and how far it would ultimately travel. Something about that

message seemed to connect with the need for hope that was felt so keenly by us all.” Mark goes on to say that his artwork “partially veils the Cathedral’s altar, imposing its message upon the Gothic architecture of the building and placing it within the context of faith and contemplation. I am excited and grateful for the opportunity to present a new large-scale version of this work to a new audience within the resonant, historical setting of Southwark Cathedral”. I saw it for myself earlier this week. It is extraordinary. As you look at it though, you realise that the figure of Christ and the saints carved into the High Altar and in the stained glass above shine through both the beautiful colours of the tapestry as well as through the words of the title, outlined in black print. Hope shines through. If you get the chance to visit and see it for yourself, do. If not, there are a few leaflets in the cross aisle which give you an idea of this piece of art ‘Please believe these days will pass....’

As the Dean writes: “As we move as a nation through the various delayed stages of the roadmap leading to the complete relaxation of the Coronavirus restrictions, it is easy to believe that it is now all behind us. Yet we must never forget that much of the world is still in the grip of a pandemic” – for billions still do not have the luxury of the vaccine that many of us have been given. We cheer because many more can now crowd in to watch a Wimbledon or Wembley final in person – yet the rest of the world is still suffering from the effects of Covid-19 in a way that few of us can imagine.

So we are encouraged to have a wider vision and to see our world as it currently is. Paul, speaking to the Corinthians, encourages them to ‘open wide their hearts’ to the whole world. In our Collect we ask God to ‘look on this wounded world in pity and in power and hold us fast to your promises of peace’. Here are messages of hope. So too the message of this installation in our Cathedral is also a message of hope, because of the truth that ‘these days will pass’ and we must hold on to that belief, that hope. Jesus spoke to his disciples about the passing of days, of powers and times, when he says this to them in Luke’s Gospel:

‘Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away’. (Luke 21.32-33)

His words are both disturbing and comforting. In a similar way this art installation is both reassuring yet realistic. As Andrew Nunn says, ‘these days may pass, but what will remain, what will we find, what is there new that awaits us beyond the passing’? In truth of course we do not know. Our world has changed in an extraordinary way since January/February 2020 – and we still do not really know how it will all turn out. It is very much a case of living a day at a time and not trying to look too far ahead to what might be, which is all so unknown and unknowable.

For Christians it is the enduring Word of God, who we recognise in Jesus, which gives us hope for the future. If these last eighteen months have taught us anything, it is that we have to have faith and trust in God that “all shall be well”. Mentally, spiritually and physically we have been battered by this storm – and no doubt there will be other storms ahead; but we are still here together and full of the Christian hope to which we cling – hope for ourselves and our world and its people – people to whom we open wide our hearts in faith and hope and love.

I finish with a prayer written by Andrew Nunn, Dean of Southwark Cathedral:

God of every passing age, be with us in what remains, in what endures, in what survives and strengthen those for whom these days do not seem to be passing.

Amen.