

## Sermon given Sun 18<sup>th</sup> November 2018 – Yr B – Mark 13: vs 1-8.

What a week we've had? After last weekend and a wonderful Remembrance across the country and Europe with Leaders of the European Countries together with world leaders, countries and communities coming together to honour the end of 100 years of WW1. Such Love surrounded us. The love of those who laid down their own lives for us and our love and gratitude for them. There was so much hope for tomorrow.

Then Monday comes and as the week goes on it seems we have forgotten all that brought us together, when news from the EU comes that we have forged an agreement or deal for us to leave the EU. That's great news! Yes! But then all of a sudden, it's like last weekend never happened!!

We look around us at the world leaders and wonder where on earth they are leading us. We look at our communities and what is happening all around us. There are medical services being closed down, people in labour being expected to drive 15-25 miles to their nearest hospital to have their babies, schools struggling through lack of money, small schools for special needs children being shut locally and large special needs schools being created miles away from where people live. Then we need to care for our environment, cut down on carbon emissions, yet anything local within walking distance is being disintegrated, we need our cars to take us to these hospitals because our ambulances are already over stretched. Before long health will be the preserve of the rich. All this I have read in the news this week.

With all that and Fake News thrown in, if we were to take on board everything we read and hear we could soon get depressed, demoralized and darn right miserable.

But isn't this what Jesus is warning us of "When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. <sup>8</sup>For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs".

Do not be afraid; why not (??) because it all sounds so scary out there; why?? ..... because there is hope. Not just the eschatological hope that there is for us all but tangible hope in the here and now. Our hope for human kind is in God.

When things happen and it is a fundamental part of our life that there is disagreement and people pitch against people, but it is also fundamentally true that we have the constant quest for hope, for meaning, truth and goodness and we seek to transcend the boundaries of the present.

In the book *Hope against Hope* by Richard Bauchman and Trevor Hart, they write,

*“From the simplest purposeful action (beginning with getting out of bed in the morning) to the most complex scientific, artistic or political engagement with the human condition, humanity lives not only by instinct and by desire; but by hope”.*

Religious hope or pious hope has received a bad press in the past and has often been due to misperception. Karl Marx offered an analysis with respect to religious hope, as you may remember he called religion the opiate of the masses, which actually is not inaccurate, for hope does bring a peace of mind. But Karl Marx saw it as a pacifier of the people; making people accept their lot in life and preventing them from becoming reactionary. He felt that hope led to the oppressed becoming numb to the darker realities of life. But to understand it in this way is wholly misrepresented.

The theologian, Jurgen Moltmann, writes,

*“Faith, wherever it develops into hope, causes not rest but unrest, not patience but impatience. It does not calm the unquiet heart, but is itself this unquiet heart in man. Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it. Peace with God means conflict with the world, for the goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present”*

Christ did not stand by and watch injustice continue, he raged against it, he spoke the truth against it for he loved us greatly. Our faith, far from paralyzing the masses, actually provides our fuel and our hope for a better future. It is our hope for better in the future, for us, for our children and for those have gone before us that makes us different from those who have no hope for tomorrow.

I do often wonder if the rise in mental health problems of this nation and of our young people in particular, is their loss of hope. Hopelessness saps our energy and imprisons us with a tyranny that Christ will not own. Christ knocked down the doors of that prison and he offers hope, both here, now, today; thy Kingdom come; on earth as it is in heaven; aswell as in the Kingdom yet to come.

Every step of Christ's journey here on earth guided us to God, everything He did was to point us to the one God who we are unable to see, yet in Christ we saw that Godlike presence. Christ gives us such Love and a hope to hold on to.

Our God is one of Love, one of greatness; he is the hope of our futures, here on earth and beyond. He has shown us a better way; a way to be more than merely human.

We have hope in the future, for we have seen God's healing power in our nation, we see how our gymnasts can flex their bodies into ridiculous shapes and angles, we see how our athletes can run for long periods of time and at great speeds, we have seen how our para-olympians have overcome great obstacles to become tremendous athletes, all these physical feats transform our lives in general, yet they begin with just a mustard seed of hope.

We have seen how great minds overcome great problems, just look at the world we now have at our fingertips. What great minds saw that future, what great hope did they have?

All this makes me think, of the words of the song by Louis Armstrong, What a Wonderful World,

*"I hear babies cry, I watch them grow  
They'll learn much more than I'll never know  
And I think to myself what a wonderful world"*

What then of the internal, the soul and our "Cosmic" God? Hope is the energy we need to see us through the troubles and tribulations of this age; and we are called on to offer that hope to others. We are asked to Love those that God sends to us and inspire hope within them and, it is within us, to lead a better life, to create a little piece of God's Kingdom here on earth.

As we approach Advent and all its readings of the eschatological hope, we need to remind ourselves that the hope for the here and now is just as important and that our God does not disappoint. All we have to do is open our hearts and minds and let him in and more importantly share His Love with others.

As Ghandi once wrote,

*"You Christians look after a document containing enough dynamite to blow all civilisation to pieces, turn the world upside down and bring peace to a battle-torn planet. But you treat it as though it is nothing more than a piece of literature."*

But sadly he also,

*"I like your Christ; (but) I do not like your Christians.  
Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."*

Let us change that perception. We have a Bible so full of hope for the world, filled with pages of wisdom and Love within it; our God has shown us how to love and has promised that if we come to Him, He will never leave us.

When we are in the thick of it, He is alongside us. Jesus Christ knew the worst was going to happen to Him. There is no doubt whatever, that he expected this. To him suffering was a certainty. But He said I **shall** rise again. He hoped for everything and He

feared nothing because He knew He was walking in the way of the Divine. He loved with a love stronger than death it was His hope for us too.

We too should not expect to escape the labours of those who have gone before us, nor should we escape any travail pangs that may bring to birth the better things that we hope for the future.

When all seems lost; and life seems like an endless stream of bad, fake and down right disastrous news, take heart do not be overwhelmed but reach out to God, share each experience with Him to avoid bitterness or despair. His faithful Love will enfold every hurt. He leaves us his peace; surrender all that troubles you to Him because his promise is real. As we remain in the light of God's Love, the harmful factors of this world are robbed of their power to diminish our hope.

In the words of 1 Corinthians 13;

*“For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror;  
then we shall see face to face.  
Now we know in part; then we shall know fully,  
even as we are fully known.  
And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.  
But the greatest of these is love”.*