

Wars and rumours of wars by Rev John Castle

A sermon given on Sunday 9th November
2025 at St Michael's Church, Sandhurst

Reading: Luke 21:5-19

Year C, 2nd Sunday before Advent,
Remembrance Sunday



Introduction:

I wonder what Remembrance Sunday means to you?

This year is the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Three years ago when I visited my late mother in



her care home, I brought out the photograph of her brother Arthur, who was killed in 1944, aged 21, earning the George Cross for his bravery in the face of torture. As I placed the photo frame where she could see it better, she commented, “what a waste of a young life”.

Much more recently we have seen images of the terrible devastation in Gaza, where one Palestinian commented, “They have destroyed everything”. War is a terrible thing. It brings devastation and loss to so many lives.

Today, as we honour those whose lives have been given and taken away in many conflicts, we are aware that humanity seems to have learned little from the experiences of the past. While our attention has been on the wars in Gaza and

Ukraine, terrible suffering and massacres have been going on in Sudan.

So as we give thanks for the freedoms we still enjoy as a result of the sacrifices of others, the prospect for peace and prosperity in the world today looks as remote as ever. What should our attitude be towards all of this as Christians? And what comfort does our faith give us as we face the current challenges in the economy, society and the wider world?

Jesus' warnings about the future

In our gospel reading today, Jesus gives his disciples some words of warning and advice for the years that lie ahead. He knows that he will soon be leaving the world physically, and that his followers will face a variety of challenges in addition to those which will come to the world in general. And so he gives them the “heads up”, so that they will know that nothing will happen that God does not already know about, and that God will be their strength and refuge whatever trouble they will face. If we can pay attention to Jesus' words of warning and advice, we too can have an approach to the uncertainty of the future that is both realistic and hopeful.

Don't be complacent

Our reading today starts with Jesus' disciples pointing out to him how impressive the Temple was, “how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God”.¹ The Temple in Jerusalem, renovated and expanded by Herod the Great at great expense, had a reputation throughout the

¹ Luke 21:5 NRSV

world, and of course it was the centre for pilgrimage for Jews, not only those living in Palestine but in the Diaspora spread over many countries.

Jesus' reply must have sounded shocking:

'As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.'²



Jesus' followers were hoping that as the Messiah he was about to bring in an age of freedom from foreign oppression, and prosperity for the people of Israel. But that was not for now.

As Jesus predicted, forty years later the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem and its beautiful Temple.

Six centuries before, the first Temple, built by King Solomon, had been destroyed by the Babylonians, as the people of Judah and their king had ignored the warnings of the prophet Jeremiah. As they say, we learn from history that we do not learn from history.

So I think the first lesson that Jesus was teaching his disciples was this: *Don't be complacent!* If people turn away from God and allow oppression and injustice to continue, bad stuff will happen. You reap what you sow.

² Luke 2:6; see also Luke 19:41-44

There are many applications of this principle in today's world. I'll give you two. Here's the first: the warnings that scientists gave forty years ago, that continued emissions of carbon dioxide would cause problems for the climate have come true. Global warming has produced ever more severe floods, droughts and hurricanes across the globe, resulting in hunger, devastation to property and untold human suffering. These warnings were not heeded, because to admit there was a problem was inconvenient for economic prosperity and politically unpopular. Only now are we trying to retrieve the situation, and it is uncertain whether we will be able to do so, considering how little is being done to make the drastic changes that are needed.

And one consequence for us in safer, northern countries which are not so badly affected by natural disasters, will be increasing pressure from people migrating from southern, poorer countries seeking to escape the increasingly difficult living conditions we have caused. We will reap the harvest of the injustice we have created for the poorer nations of the world.

God won't protect us against the consequences of our folly and selfishness, unless we acknowledge our wrongdoing, turn to him and cry out for mercy.

Don't be led astray

A few verses after his prophecy about the fate of Jerusalem, Jesus goes on to warn his followers of charlatans and deceivers who will pop up, claiming to be him. In times of trouble, there are always people who jump on the bandwagon and claim to offer the only solution. Jesus

warned elsewhere of false prophets who are wolves in sheep's clothing³. There have been plenty of examples in modern times of religious cults that have taken advantage of people's naivety for the benefit of their leaders. But false prophets can also be found in the political sphere. I'll leave you to work out who they are!

My second example of reaping what you sow is in the area of sexual morality. The advocates of sexual freedom from the 1960's on sold us the lie that unrestricted sexual freedom would lead to fulfilment and happiness. But hedonism is inherently selfish, and when we put our own gratification above all else, people get hurt. So now we have an epidemic of pornography, corrupting the minds of young people and damaging their chances of having meaningful and respectful relationships. Mental health and self-esteem, especially among teenage girls, have plummeted. A philosophy that was sold as a key to freedom has turned out to be the route to oppression and misery.

So the message for us as we face the challenges and complexities of life, is, *Don't be led astray* by false ideologies and philosophies that pander to self-centredness and hedonism. Seek God's wisdom, and follow his commandments. Beware of offers that seem too good to be true. They probably are.

Don't be terrified

As Jesus' disciples ask him for a steer on when all this will happen, his predictions get worse – wars, earthquakes and

³ Matthew 7:15

famines are in store, Jesus warns; and for his followers, persecutions. But he begins this catalogue of woes with three important words: *Don't be terrified*⁴. And he goes on to promise, "By your endurance you will gain your souls."⁵

Fear is a natural response to danger. It motivates us to protect ourselves, either by standing and fighting whatever is threatening us, or by fleeing. But in the face of overwhelming threats from all sides, we can end up being terrified like a rabbit in the headlights and freezing, doing nothing at all. Or putting our heads in the sand, kidding ourselves that the problem won't affect us, or will go away.

Jesus tells his followers that there is trouble ahead so that they can face it realistically, and so that they can turn to God for help.

"For these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately."⁶

Or, to paraphrase, "Bad stuff happens, but it's not the end of the world".

So let's follow the warnings and advice of Jesus: Don't be complacent; don't be led astray; and don't be terrified.

Redemption

For me, one of the great things about Christianity is that it deals with the problem of evil head-on. It is realistic about the "fallen" nature of human beings: made in the image of God, with huge potential for good, but spoiled by self-

⁴ Luke 21:9

⁵ Luke 21:19

⁶ Luke 21:9

centredness which shows itself in disobeying God and hurting other people. But Christianity also offers a solution: just as the poppies we wear at this season of Remembrance remind us of the sacrifice made by others to secure our freedom, so the cross, the symbol of the Christian faith, reminds us of the supreme sacrifice that Jesus made for us and all the world. Jesus died to forgive all of our sins and to give us a new start and a fresh hope, by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. A shorthand word for this is *redemption*.

Throughout Christian history, those who believe in the power of redemption have been making the world a better place. They have shone as lights in the darkness, dedicating their lives to making life better for others. Some of them are famous, many others are unknown and uncelebrated, doing good behind the scenes, or in small but significant ways, to bring help, encouragement and hope to those in all kinds of need, and standing up for justice and righteousness. We are called to follow in their footsteps and bring God's redemption to a broken world.

So how will we face today's challenges? Do we believe that God has the power to bring healing and restoration? Small acts of kindness, giving our time, talents and money to make a difference to our community and those around us can all be ways in which God can use us to bring hope and transformation. Supporting charities who work to change the lives of people suffering in other parts of the world is another important way of putting our faith into practice.

Psalm 46 reminds us that “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”⁷ Jesus promised “I am with you always, even to the end of the world”⁸.

So let’s not be complacent; let’s not allow ourselves to be led astray; and let’s not be terrified of what may lie ahead. God will be faithful to us. Will we be faithful to him? Will we join with others to bring God’s redemption and transformation to people around us, to our country and to the world?

As we come to the Lord’s table this morning to receive the bread and the wine, we are reminded that Jesus gave everything for us.

What are we not willing to give for him?

⁷ Psalm 41:1 NRSV

⁸ Matthew 28:20