

15 November 2015

Sermon begun on Friday 13th November before the atrocities in France and rewritten on Saturday 14th

On Friday morning I struggled with our Gospel reading, Mark 13, vv1-8, my questions were

- Why had this passage been chosen for the lectionary?
- How did it relate to remembrance?
- How could the passage come alive for us?

And then Friday night in Paris – acts of dreadful violence, massacre, destruction – all meant to terrorise the population of France and all of Western Europe and the United States – so how could I deepen my struggle to answer those questions in the light of the Paris atrocities?

The Church of England's Framework for Faith

The Bible – the Tradition – Reason (experience)

The Bible

- Our gospel – probably written in about AD65 before the destruction of Jerusalem – and Jesus says “not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down”
- The disciples ask for signs – Jesus warns them not to be led astray – that there will be wars – nation will rise up against nation – earthquakes – famines – the beginning of the birth pangs – not the end
- Jesus foretells persecution – handed over to the authorities – beaten in the synagogues – taken to trial
- But Jesus also says “the good news must be proclaimed to all nations”
- And do not be afraid – the Holy Spirit is with you
- But families will betray each other – brother to brother – a father to his child – children against parents – you will be hated
- But you are to endure to the end because you will be saved

Explanation

- For the Jewish people the destruction of the Temple was catastrophic – the Temple was their history – their identity – it felt like destruction and annihilation
- For many people disaster was because the people had sinned – so battles were lost, people taken into slavery

- So these writings are often called apocalyptic – dramatic events are the signs that herald the end of the world – punishment for sin
- But there is always a context – The Romans allowed a certain freedom to its conquered empire but would be brutal if people mounted insurrection – it was very possible that Jesus could see this would happen – hence the fall of Jerusalem
- The Jewish synagogues were in turmoil because of the growth of the Christian movement within the synagogues and because the Romans began to distrust them as places of unrest – so huge betrayal
- It sounds almost poetic language but there is a very stark historical context
- BUT it was not the end of the world – The Jewish faith and Christianity separated but continued to share the Hebrew Bible – the Old Testament – both Jews and Christians were obliterated in Jerusalem and were scattered – both Jews and Christians were persecuted by the Romans but finally both survived – not always living in good relationships with each other
- Is the passage eschatological – our relationship with God is framed in the light of a promise of salvation already given in Christ – the one who endures to the end will be saved

The question “WHY” has this passage been chosen

- The battle between good and evil
- To live completely in the present world – the Kingdom of God here on earth

The Church’s Tradition

- 2000 years ago in the early centuries there was fighting within the emerging Christian Church – so called heretics were put to death, bishops were exiled – mobs were used to intimidate
- Over the last 2000 years Christians have fought Christians e.g. Roman Catholics and Reformed Church (Church of England)
- Christians have fought against those of other faiths e.g. back in Jerusalem – The Crusades
- Christians have persecuted other Christians e.g. the Spanish Inquisition
- The Church of England came into being on a very broad base and remains there – often very little theological agreement on Biblical Studies, Doctrine, Ethics, Liturgy etc
- So our Tradition remains complex when we look to it for guidance relating to the carnage in Paris

Reason

- The Church of England is a democratic institution – all people within it are expected and encourage to use their intellectual faculties
- But I know – here amongst us there is a very wide range of comment on the whole issue of contemporary terrorism and along side that – the overwhelming number of people fleeing danger in Syria – and the migrants leaving other countries to try to find freedom – release from oppression and poverty
- I have no clear answers to the problems – I acknowledge the huge complexities
- BUT as a Christian and as a priest I remember my sense of vocation and responsibilities
- I remember – and here is the link to the second question – the connection to remembrance – we need to remember the teaching of Jesus
- We pray for our enemies – we protect the weak – we care for those in need – we forgive – we pray for each other – we are called to be generous and hospitable – the list goes on – and of course more confusion sets in
- How do we protect ourselves from evil? What happened in France was evil. Terrorism is evil
- Why does evil exist – it is not a new question – but we are told to endure to the end – not to be alarmed
- We are told that God is with us – we have the faculty of reason – we can only do the best we can do in the circumstances we are in – we have the example of Christ – we have our Scriptures – we have each other

And finally

- We are human – we have human experience
- From my humanity which I share with you I ask you to pray for those who died, those who are bereaved, those injured, those who are traumatised
- And for the enemy which must be overthrown – the evil which destroys, maims and crucifies – we must pray for them
- And for all of us caught up in this nightmare – pray for understanding – pray for deepened faith – pray for courage
- This Biblical passage has come alive for us in the pain of dying and injured victims – for all of us
- We belong to God and to each other

Rev'd Judith Roberts