

Sermon Luke 21 5-19 Remembrance Sunday 13th November 2022

“But not a hair on your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls”

Luke's Gospel from Chapters 9 to 21 traces the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem. On arrival he wept, suffered efforts to entrap him---though each time he silenced his opponents with his skilful answers, Now in chapter 21 Jesus is alerting his followers to the hardships that lie ahead through his apocalyptic statements. Jesus testifies to the hope that by enduring with him and believing in him he will ensure that not a hair on your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls”

Mother Julian of Norwich had the same belief in the promise of Jesus. She was an anchoress or a female hermit living in medieval Norwich in the late 14th century, we don't know her real name for sure; perhaps she was Julian, which could be a female name then as well as a male one, but she could be called Mother Julian because St Julian's was the church in which she had her cell. At a time when she was dangerously ill and indeed near death she was given a series of visions of God's great tenderness and love, and she reflected on those visions for the rest of her life . She wrote of the visions God had given her - that 'all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.' In her book Revelations of Divine Love. She is considered to be the earliest woman to be writing in English.

Mother Julian's words just seem to be right for the way the world is at present. These are words of quiet confidence and trust: "All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." The world may not feel quite like that just now. This has been a strange and difficult year, and many of us feel much less certain now about the path ahead than we did at the start of the year. But Mother Julian knew darkness and uncertainty too; and yet she wrote those words (and much more besides about the goodness and constant love of her Lord).

At this darkening time of the year, it can take us a while to adjust; I don't much like the short days and dark nights, it can get me down, and most of us are not good with

darkness. Of course, we can keep it at bay to a far greater degree than our forebears could, so much so that we could fool ourselves that we've got it all under control. But deep inside we know that's not true, and the same fear of the dark that our ancestors knew still lurks within us. And yet back in those darker medieval times, long before electric lights, Mother Julian was able to say with serene confidence: "All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." That's the message, too, of today's Gospel reading from Luke chapter 21. A good message to have in mind on Remembrance Sunday. Many years ago, Archbishop Desmond Tutu famously wrote: "This we believe: that good is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate; that light is stronger than darkness, and life is stronger than death." Those words arose out of a faith that sustained him through the years of apartheid in South Africa. They connect to the promise given to Mother Julian by God. For why is it that all shall be well? It is because good is stronger than evil; because light is stronger than darkness.

In our church services candles are lit on the altar table. There's an old Chinese proverb that says, "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." As soon as one small candle is lit in a dark room it immediately starts to drive back the darkness. And once one candle has been lit, others can be lit from it, and the flame is passed on. You could just sit out the darkness and save your matches, but that's not our way. Jesus said, "Shine as lights to the world," and as his people we're called not only to light candles for ourselves, but to light them for others too, to be ready to pass the flame on.

Every candle lit in a church is a statement that light is stronger than darkness, and life is stronger than death. Today the focus of our prayer should be not just to pause at the memorials of those who died in war, but to ensure that their light is passed on. We give thanks today for those who stood firm at the darkest of times in defence of freedom - not only their own freedom but that of the world. "Nation will rise against nation," said Jesus. The first great war of the last century was supposed to be the one that ended all wars, but in the event the world had a mere twenty years or so of fitful

peace. And since then, war and violence continues, as it has throughout human history, and maybe now in more confusing, testing and dangerous ways than ever before. And yet that promise remains true: "All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well" - as we continue to trust in God, and as we continue to choose to live lives dedicated to his love, and as the cross continues to be our sign.

The word 'crucial' is rather overused in the media today. All sorts of things are crucial, we're told, only to find them really of temporary and passing importance. But the earlier meaning of the word crucial really means "of the cross." The lights we light on our altar bring us back to that most decisive event in human history, a drama played out in the shadows, far from the centres of power, on a dark day for the world. A man was put to death, though he'd done no wrong. He hung there and died, though he could have saved himself. He was laid in a tomb, but three days later that tomb was empty.

That's what lies at the heart of what we're doing here today in these dark and testing times. The cross is something that should really be a threat and a curse, speaking only of defeat and disaster, but it's been made a sign of triumph, and as we think about it we can know that love is stronger than hate, and life is stronger than death. That light is stronger than darkness. The apostle John calls Jesus the light of the world; our humble candles reflect that light, a light to drive back the darkness of sin and death, to restore our hope, and to help us make sense of it all.

Mother Julian was dedicated to the cross; she had herself come close to the cross, and she'd felt there the radiance of the love offered for all the world to see: the power and beauty of a love for her, and for all the world, with no limits to its reach. Whatever else we may have or hold or own in our lives, love is more precious; and it's the opportunities to receive love, to offer love, to share in love that make human existence worthwhile; anyone who settles for anything less than love is missing out. This is the good news proclaimed by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and celebrated by Mother Julian and Desmond Tutu and many others over the years: love

isn't just for here and now, fleeting moments to grasp while we can; it is for ever, it's what makes sense of us; and it's God's eternal desire and design for us. Even as we stand and remember today, even as we look at the news bulletins and wonder and worry, even as the leaves fall and the sky darkens, even at the times of betrayal and hatred, "all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."

The Victorian missionary David Livingstone prayed: Lord send me anywhere, only go with me. Lay any burden on me, but only sustain me. The promise Jesus gave is the same as always: I am with you even to the end of the world. Amen