

Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Sermon title: All Saints, on earth as it is in heaven

Text: Revelation 4 (and Luke 8:22-25)

To be a follower of Jesus is to sign up to living with the tension of now but not yet, to pray “Your Kingdom come on earth as in heaven” and to live in the waiting place

It is to be someone who is at one and the same time baffled but attracted to the challenge and the promise we looked at last week that “Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven ...”

to recognise but not fully understand the deep and attractive truth that “Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted ...”

that the blessing isn’t just in the future comfort but also somehow in the present mourning

One person has called this “the presence of the future”, the “now but not yet” quality of being a follower of Jesus

What we only glimpse today we will one day experience in its fullness

But the glimpse is enough to sustain us now because somehow that future fullness fills and sustains us in our present experience!

In my time as a minister in various and different churches this sustaining glimpse of the presence of the future is a common thread that has enabled people to live with a quality of life in the face of life-threatening illnesses, to live with an inner peace in the face of high degrees of uncertainty in the work place, and to pass through their own death or that of a loved one with a quiet trust that this is not the end that it appears to be

The reading that we have from the Book of Revelation was originally, we believe, written to sustain early Christians as they braced themselves for a furious persecution by the Roman Empire

John, the one who records this amazing vision full of highly symbolic pictures, is himself a captive on the prison island of Patmos

And yet in the midst of his present experience of suffering he is given a vision that not only promises that one day all will be well, but that this “wellness” can fill him and his fellow believers with concrete hope in the midst of all that they must now suffer

For Christianity is no divine insurance policy against no ill ever touching us

It is the most realistic of faiths because it has the capacity to empower ordinary people to face suffering and even persecution, but to dare to believe that God can overwhelm and transform those things of death to become sources of life

In order to begin to understand John’s vision of heaven we need to make sure we have the right starting point

Most naturally we think about heaven as a future experience, after death

The vision of the Book of Revelation is that heaven is a present parallel dimension of reality, alongside what we experience in the here and now of time and space, an infinite parallel to the finite experience that you and I are aware of

You could say that it is another paradox to live with for those who are followers of Jesus, but maybe one that is not so hard for us to grasp whose daily experience in an international community is to live in one place but have citizenship of another, to live with an eye on two sets of news, with affections, family and friends tugging our hearts in two directions

This paradox is caught in the way the language John uses:

I looked and heard (vI) - past

Come up and I will show you what must take place (vIb) – future

Whole rest of the description in the present tense – “Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning” (v5), the elders fall (v10), the song they sing to God is that “You are worthy” (v11)

It is all very confusing until we realise that in order to grasp John’s vision, along side our intellects we need to start using our imaginations, for it is our imaginations that opens us up to the eternal

For as we do so anything becomes possible

Including that this is a description of past, present and future

Here at the start of the Book of Revelation is a vision of God’s rule over all things and at all times

That same rule spilled over into the finite world we inhabit powerfully in the coming of Jesus, through His words and actions

In our gospel reading this is seen in His power over the natural order, rebuking the wind and waves and bringing calm

He then turned to his followers, his disciples and asked: where is your faith?

To be a follower of Jesus is to follow him wherever he goes and whatever he does, trust he is in control, a control we glimpse in the revelation of John

And this incident very clearly says: READ Lk 8:22

In other words, Jesus had led and they had followed him to this point in the middle of the lake – to somewhere where a storm blew up

Whether Jesus knew a storm would come or not isn’t the question

For their part by following him they had put their faith in him

And for His part he would protect them.

He did protect them

But half way across when the winds started blowing, they stopped following him and started following their fears

Once the waves died down at His command Jesus gives them another chance to start following Him again when he says: where is your faith?

- in yourself?
- or in me?

A few years later ordinary disciples in Rome faced persecution for being followers of Jesus and so faced the same question – where is our faith – in ourselves or in Him?

For the next 2000 years generation after generation of dps have faced the choices and the consequences that flow from being a follower of Jesus in a world whose values are often very different and who know the cost that it brings

They are and will be those followers of Jesus who - today and tomorrow, in the global north and south, in countless schools and offices, churches and communities – who seek to be “poor in spirit” trusting that somehow through that the Kingdom comes, that God’s power and love is released not only into their lives but the lives and the situations around them

For this is the calling of all disciples in every age, to live by faith as much here and now on earth as also in heaven