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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon :
11 August 2019“End of Life & Hebrew”

**Sermon: 11 August 2019 &
Readings Luke 12:32-40 & Hebrews 11:1-3&8-16**

You know, mostly August is a very slow news month. Nothing happens. A whole load of the people who might otherwise generate news are off on holiday, relaxing right down. And those who remain at work make no major announcements, knowing that half the people who would be interested in them are also away. Any announcement would fall far flatter than one made at other times of the year.

But not this year. This year, we have a new and considerably more radical Prime Minister and Cabinet – who seem to be changing not just the whole Brexit policy but almost every other Government policy as well – almost as if they were a completely new political party coming into office. The Prime Minister has always been news worthy, seeming to attract a level of media attention that many other politicians might envy – certainly if all of it were good.

Internationally, a relatively stable period of growing world co-operation is at serious risk from trade wars and other growing policy differences. The situation in Kashmir, involving as it does the two nuclear powers of India and Pakistan, looks dangerous to the world as a whole. Civil unrest in Hong Kong and in Moscow continue, despite threats and Government action. And the sabre rattling between presidents Putin and Trump is getting worse. The breakdown in at least one of the old nuclear proliferation treaties brings the possibility of complete world disaster a lot closer – I think I fear all-out nuclear war more than I have for over thirty years. And all that is even before the growing very physical evidence of the harm we have already done to the world through global warming.

In all, it looks a lot to me like we might be living through the wars and rumours of wars which Jesus tells His disciples (as reported in St Matthew’s Gospel) are the forerunners to the End of the Age. And certainly, Humanity as a whole now has it well within its

power to end human civilisation pretty comprehensively over the next few years and decades, if not life on Earth.

So how we should react, as Christians, to this situation? Well, as Christians, we are in a lot better position than most other people. For a start, we do not need to panic. As Jesus Himself says, reported by Luke at the start of the Gospel reading that we have just heard – “Do not be afraid little flock”. God himself is here, present, ready and willing to give us His Kingdom. And the end of the Old Age presages the beginning of the New Age, where the will of God will rule all.

It is just as true now as it was two thousand years ago, when the words were first said, that we need to be prepared for anything that might happen, and be ready to react in a Christian manner. Ultimately, God is in charge, and whatever happens is allowed for in His plan. We need to be ready, alert like those servants awaiting their master, not knowing whether he will come today or tomorrow or another few thousand years in the future. And the powers of the World, the politicians and leaders, could have a lot more reason than us to fear God’s ultimate purpose and may well be surprised when that purpose comes about, as unexpectedly as a thief in the night.

Our bulwark, the thing that enables us to do this – to stick firm in our readiness to be strong in our Christianity – is our faith. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”. In this we are part of a very long line of people faithful to God, stretching well back before Christ to Abraham and even earlier. The writer of Hebrews is very well aware of this, writing as he clearly is to a Christian congregation strongly grounded in their Jewish past. He often draws parallels between the current situation of the people he is writing to and passages of Old Testament history.

Invariably he points out the new interpretation that needs to be made of the Old Testament in the light of the Gospel of Christ. Like that congregation, we are part of a long tradition, and like them need to periodically re-evaluate our old and instinctive beliefs and interpretations in the light of the teaching of Jesus and in the context of our own days.

We will be hearing more from the writer of Hebrews. Over the next weeks the first reading in all our main services will come from his Epistle. Let’s join with him in his clear determination to take a long tradition and strengthen and improve it.

In the meantime, God bless us all, and keep us strong in the faith that God has given us.

In the name of the Father, and of the son...