

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : Ninth Sunday after Trinity
Sunday 14th August 2022

TRINITY 9 2022
HEBREWS 11:29-12:2 AND LUKE 12:49-56

Wow, those are both pretty grim bible readings, set readings which will be heard in all Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. They don't make easy listening. Today's theme is that when we fix our eyes on Jesus our lives will reflect him – but sometimes understanding the scriptures isn't easy and doesn't help. Hebrews paints a terrible picture of the suffering endured by many down the ages and urges us to get rid of everything that hinders and entangles us, so that we can run the race more easily and comfortably. The best way of doing that is by keeping our sight fixed on Jesus. Luke records Jesus not speaking of peace but of alarming divisions that might arise between households and families. But perhaps when he speaks in this way, he isn't so much imagining the separating of one from another but perhaps more that human beings have the freedom of choice to be separated. Separated within a family, a community, a church or separated from God. Jesus wants to count everyone in but he well knows that some may choose to opt out. The fire that Jesus speaks of could be destructive or it could be the empowering fire of the Spirit. There is no doubt that Jesus is stressed and under pressure. Perhaps we don't easily imagine him to have been a person who got stressed. But he only had a few years to carry out his mission – and time is running out.

Time is running out. That is a phrase we are hearing more and more of late. We are living through times of great uncertainty and instability – and it is particularly frightening to those of us who like certainty and stability in our lives. As we suffer

badly from heat and drought, we have all become more and more aware of our beautiful yet fragile world and the huge problems which it faces. Wars being conducted hundreds of miles away are having serious impacts on all our lives – not least in financial terms. And the church isn't perhaps helping. 650 Anglican bishops have recently met at the Lambeth Conference and sadly much of their discussions were not over war and human suffering and the need for people to hear God's word – but over sexuality. These and many other issues can seem to be absolutely insoluble: a state of affairs which might easily lead many of us to feel real pessimism and despair.

But. But we need to remember that our Christian faith was founded upon such tensions and go forward with a real sense of courage and determination as shown to us by Jesus of Nazareth to run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

Two final random thoughts for you to ponder and take away with you and which might bring some hope and comfort in these times.

Recently I attended a Memorial Service for someone who had lived a good Christian life. The reading was a well-known one from the Book of Ecclesiastes – part of which goes like this:

“There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heaven: a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot; a time to tear down and a time to build up; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to keep and a time to throw away; a time to tear and a time to mend; a time to be silent and a time to speak; a time for war and a time for peace.”

What I had never noticed before were these words that followed on:

“God has made everything beautiful in its time and he has also set eternity in the human heart; for there is

nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live – this is the gift of God”. “There is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live – this is the gift of God”.

The second thought I leave with you is the fourth verse of the hymn we shall sing “Dear Lord and Father of Mankind” – which might give us some real comfort and hope in the unsettling and stressful times through which our world is living:

*Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace;
the beauty of thy peace.*

May these words give us comfort and hope as we continue the race that is set before us.