

Sermon Notes from 10 am service 29 November 2009

Jeremiah 33 v 14- 16

Luke 21 v 25-36

Sermon- divided people

The prophet Jeremiah – challenging chap- not invited to too many parties- do I look good in this no you look fat would be his line- he was a man who said it like it was whether you wanted to hear that or not- anyway Jeremiah tells the divided people how it will be.

Just let me pause for a moment and talk about the divided people. Who you are talking about when you say 'Israel' varies. Do you mean the 12 tribes- when David and Solomon were Kings? Do you mean the 10 tribes of the north who were largely taken into exile and lost? Or do you mean the group that started as Judah and then after their time of deportation and return ended up as Israel? Who do you mean? Jeremiah is talking at the time when there are still 2 houses. The role of successor of King David will be handed on through Judah and we believe will come to its fulfilment in the birth of Jesus-mmm that must be why they have that reading here at the start of Advent. These lectionaries are not just thrown together you know.

All the horror of deportation and war that I so lightly glossed over is to be coming to an end when a branch of the line of David will sprout and he will do what is just and right in the land. In some ways that has come true in other ways we are still waiting. Nobody could say that Israel is a place of safety certainly not the people who live there. But it is true that we are in a new phase.

So from the Luke reading there will be mayhem but then the sun will come out and you will know that the Kingdom of God is close at hand. The word of God is to stay firm even though all around you it looks like chaos and suffering. Stand firm. Stick with what you have confidence as being right. What has been your life's work till now and keep with it. Jesus warns of tough times ahead but tells the people heads up do not be overburdened with anxious thoughts. Eyes up and keep on doing what you do. Look at the signs the kingdom of God is near.

OK but what happens when you look at what is going on around you and it looks very different from the kingdom of God? What are you to do

then? Well the message from both Jeremiah and Jesus is of times of turbulence that will lead to something better. The metaphor everyone always used is a woman in labour. If you saw that without knowing what is going on all that sweat and blood and swearing you would think it was torture for no end but it is a something that has a shape and will lead to something good.

OK So In Cockermouth will Adrian Smeaton the URC minister there have followed the lectionary and if he did not then I bet his Roman Catholic and Anglican colleagues did. When people houses are covered in sludge and a local policeman has been drowned. When these things begin to take place what would you be saying? In the middle of all that looks like chaos and suffering. The word from Jesus is, stand firm and lift up your heads.

And in the church in Afghanistan? Underground –stand firm. That is not in the methods of the past but in the message of the power of the living God. It is not the repeating of old patterns that has the power. That is where we sometimes get lost it is in the new and evolving understanding of God that comes in times darkness as well as light. Yet alongside that there are times when what you do is not based on how it feels nor on rewards nor on what you see around you. You do what is right because you know it is right and you keep on doing it time after time after time. Or the story of the church in Bazra where of the 13 people baptised this year 11 of them have been killed. Stand firm. Or what would you be saying if you were a Roman Catholic priest preaching in Ireland today? With the terrible stories of child abuse and the institutional cover up? In the middle of the chaos when those you should have been able to trust have let down the most vulnerable. It makes it all clear that there are truths which are true whatever it looks like on the surface and however it feels. We wait for the fullness of the kingdom of God. We are not surprised by the chaos of the world and we keep on doing in small ways the things that we believe to be right and the things of the light however dark things are around us. Be brave and be of good courage.