

Brancepeth sermon
17 November 2025

2 Thess. 3:6-13

Luke 21:5-19

Psalm 98

May I speak in the name of the Father,

and of the Son,

and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Well, those were cheery readings, weren't they.

A condemnation of idlers –

designed to make anyone who does not labour night and day

feel guilty;

and then Jesus in his most apocalyptic mood:

all wars and insurrections, dreadful portents, and false prophets.

But those are the readings we've been set,

so let's see what we can do with them!

We'll come back briefly to Paul and the idlers later,

but for now let's stick with Jesus and his predictions of disaster.

This is the kind of passage that I guess people have in mind

when they walk around with 'The End Is Nigh' sandwich boards.

The idea, I think, is that when you see

all these dark and dreadful things happening around you,

when the world is filled with wars and rumours of wars,

with false messiahs,

with earthquakes, famines and plagues,

you know that the end is near,

that Judgment Day is coming,

so you had better get ready!

Except, of course, that that's not what Jesus says in this passage.

Yes, he says, all these things *will* happen –

but he says, ‘Yes, they will happen,

but the end will not follow immediately.’

And he wasn’t wrong.

You can imagine these words being read by followers of Jesus

back in the first century,

when the Romans finally destroyed Jerusalem,

and the whole world that Jesus’ disciples had known

was demolished and scattered.

But the end didn’t follow immediately.

You can imagine these words being read

in the fifth century, say, when the western Roman world,

which by then was a Christian world,

was taken apart by barbarian invasions,

and all that Christians had built seemed to be under threat.

But the end didn’t follow immediately.

You can imagine these words being read

when the Black Death spread in the fourteenth century,

and Europe lost between a third and a half of its whole population,
and it seemed *obvious* that the Last Days had come –

But the end didn't follow immediately.

Or when the Great War, the War to End all Wars raged

But the end didn't follow immediately.

Or when the atrocities of the Second World War were at their height.

But the end didn't follow immediately.

And we could carry that list on, and on, and on.

And what about us now?

We face climate catastrophe,

and increasingly widespread refusal to do anything about it;

we face wars and the threat of wars,

not just in Ukraine and Gaza,

but in Sudan, Myanmar, Congo, the Maghreb, Ethiopia, and more;

we face the world's greatest superpower

sliding rapidly into authoritarianism;

we face the terrifying rise of the hard right, not just abroad but here;

we face a backlash, undermining decades of slow, fragile progress
on fighting racism and other forms of discrimination;
we face safeguarding scandal after safeguarding scandal,
rocking the churches;
we face the rise of generative AI,
with terrifying implications for education, for jobs,
for our ability to identify trustworthy sources of knowledge.

When I talk to my own children about the state of the world,
it's clear that they think that the world is simply broken,
and that our generation has broken it for them,
and that there's not much prospect of things getting better.
Things are grim, and the outlook is even worse.

But the end isn't following immediately.

Jesus' message in the midst of all this is *not*

'The End is Nigh' - 'Drop what you are doing, and head for the hills!'

Instead, he gives his followers two messages to hold onto
in the midst of all the gloom, all the anxiety, all the fear.

The first is quite simply a message about keeping going.

‘By your *endurance*’, he says, ‘you will gain your souls.’

All that we can do, all that we should do,

in the midst of all this darkness,

is, perhaps, just *to keep going*:

to keep looking after one another, keep supporting one another,

keep on, together, putting one foot in front of another,

and not giving way to despair.

It is not that Jesus tells us that the bad things won’t really happen.

He’s clear on that.

Bad things *will* happen, they will *continue* to happen,

and that’s just how things are.

Jesus doesn’t promise his disciples that they will somehow

live in a world insulated from all the disasters and tragedies he describes.

Rather, he tells them that, with God

no good thing is lost, not for ever –

no hair of their heads.

God holds all, God remembers all, and God will restore all.

Don't despair, don't give up hope,
not because you've got some guarantee that things won't get darker,
but because you've got a God who
won't let the darkness have the last word.

So you may think that the little good we can build here in a dark world
is too frail, too fleeting to mean anything;
that it's not worth it, given everything that is going on –
and maybe it *won't* last, maybe it *won't* make much of a difference –
but God won't forget it;
it won't ultimately be lost;
it therefore still *means* something.

No good thing is lost, not forever.

So we should keep on; we should endure.

I don't think, by the way, that we should understand Jesus' message
simply as a message about *individual* resilience.

Such messages can often make things worse –
they can make you feel guilty if you simply *can't* keep going,
if you *can't* stay on top of things,
if you *can't* stay cheerful and optimistic.

Nobody who knew the Jewish scriptures like Jesus knew them –
who knew all those Psalms of lament, all those passages in Job,
could think that endurance was a matter of
each individual constantly keeping a stiff upper lip,
and refusing to let things get on top of them.
‘If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs’ –
well, maybe you’ve misunderstood the situation.

No, this is not (I think) about purely individual resilience.

It is an instruction to a community:

keep on looking after each other,
keep on supporting each other,
keep on praying for one another and for the world,
keep on calling out to God together –
and don’t despair,
don’t think that what you’re doing together is irrelevant,
don’t think that it makes no difference,
don’t think that there’s no point to any of it.

And don't think that maybe it would be more rational
simply to give up and wait for the end –
whether that's the end of the world,
the end of one's own life,
the end of the church in Brancepeth,
or any other kind of end.

And perhaps, by the way, that is the kind of laziness
that Paul was talking about:
the idleness of people who think there's nothing to be done,
because the end is coming, or because things have got so bad,
that there is nothing worth doing.

No. *The end isn't following immediately.*

There is still life to be lived, still work to be done together.

Don't abandon it just because you think it can't last.

Don't give up just because it doesn't make much of a difference.

Keep on building your life together,
keep on making and sharing food together,
keep on planning and leading services together,
keep on tending the churchyard together,

keep on looking out together for ways to welcome your neighbours,
keep on keeping on together, as long as you can,
because *the end isn't following immediately*,
and because no good thing will be lost.
God will remember it all.

But then, as well as that message of endurance,
there's also a message about truth-telling.
It's in the part of the passage where Jesus talks about
his followers being arrested and persecuted.
And Jesus was, of course, addressing people,
some of whom were going to be facing *real* persecution,
and, unlike Christians in many other parts of the world today,
that's not at all something that we face here,
so his words in this part of the passage may seem not to apply to us.

But, on a very, very much smaller scale,
we might find that no one is listening to us,

we might find that people laugh at or despise the kind of message
we want to share with the world.

We might find that our world is going to hell in a handbasket,
and that nothing we can say seems to make any difference.

But Jesus' instruction – his rather strange instruction
about not preparing anything to say in one's defence –
well, I wonder if he was advising his followers
not to worry about coming up with clever strategies,
not to think there might be some cunning way of
saying exactly the right thing to make a difference,
not to work out how to be effective, how to be influencers,
but simply – to *speak the truth*;
to *speak from the heart*;
to speak out of what they knew and experienced;
to keep things simple.

In a dark and difficult world,
where we don't know what difference we can make,
part of our endurance is to
keep on speaking the truth, and to keep it simple.

That's something we can do.

It may not make any difference,
it may seem an entirely weak and ineffectual response
to the world as it is,
but *no good thing will be lost with God*.
God will value the truth we speak, even if no one else does.

So we should continue to speak hope
when all the voices around us speak only despair;
we should continue to speak faith
when all the voices around us speak only cynicism;
we should continue to speak love
when all the voices around us speak only hate.

We should continue to speak the truth,
with whatever little voices we have been given –
not because it's some grand strategy, some cunning plan,
but simply because it's what we are called to be and to do.

When others are blaming immigrants
for the darkness of the world, and stirring up fear,

or when others are saying it is too hard or too costly
to look after this planet we've been given,
we should continue to speak the truth in love,
continue to speak the truth *of* love.

That's what we can do in the midst of the darkness –
keep on enduring, keep on keeping on together,
and keep on speaking the truth of love,
whether it makes a visible difference or not –
because *the end is not following immediately*,
and *no good thing will be lost*.

Amen