



Thirty-third Sunday Ordinary Time

Malachi 3: 19-20 Thessalonians 3: 7-12 Luke 21: 5-19

We have reached the second last Sunday of the church's year and as you would expect the readings are about endings, outcomes and transitions.

The prophet Malachi puts before us two strong images to reflect on.

The day is coming, blazing like an oven, the proud and evil ones will be like stubble. As summer approaches we do not need much imagination. We have all experienced such days when the heat seems to suck the breath from our lungs. It is a powerful image of being helpless before the merciless sun.

The other image is in sharp contrast; for the good, the sun rises with healing rays like the warmth that reaches into your bones after a night spent in the cold wet bush.

The writer is using our world, and our experiences, as a kind of prayer book. He says, "Look around you! God speaks to you in everything" Evil, no matter how attractively packaged, is drought for the spirit and leads to the diminishment of the self and desolation.

In Luke we have a picture of destruction. There are revolts, war, religious persecution, plagues, and famines. Even the earth seems to rise against us in earthquakes, floods and storms. These calamities have occurred throughout history and modern communications report these stories on an almost daily basis. What are we to learn from this? Jesus remarks follow from overhearing people discussing the temple. They were admiring the beauty, architectural splendour, the costly decorations and the donations that had been made. They also saw the temple as a symbol of stability and power.

Such preoccupation with the temporary called forth from Jesus a reminder of what is of value. With dramatic emphasis Jesus warns that what appears permanent is often too temporary and not worth clinging to.

Jesus calls us to work for the healing of the world but such work is dangerous. To challenge the narrow-mindedness of the community is like poking a stick in a wasps' nest. Call religious people to give up their shallow legalistic view of God and you will incur their wrath. Ask politicians and public servants to be accountable and there will be evasiveness. Even among our own families divisions will occur. To work for reconciliation may not make you popular.

The pictures of destruction are not comfortable but they are not always negative. The ground is ploughed up for new crops. Buildings are demolished because they are unsafe. Diseases spur scientists to redouble their efforts. Poor leadership calls forth

personal responsibility. In conflict people call for mediation in an attempt to postpone warfare. People rally to save endangered species. These are signs of growth even if they sometimes appear so insignificant.

Many groups read these stories as signs of God's anger or of the end of the world.

If we speak of the anger of God we have to remember that we are using imagery. To say God is angry is our way of saying that we recognise the situation as being the antithesis of the world Jesus' described as reflecting the kingdom of God; non-violent, free, inclusive and respecting human dignity.

Modern technology with its potential for destruction on a large scale draws people to think of the end of the world. There are people who think that spreading fear will bring about conversion.

Jesus said, "Do not be afraid" Fear paralyses. The Gospel is Good News. Faith is placing all endings as well as all beginnings in the heart of a God of love.

Patricia Stevenson rsj.