

Sermon - Being actively alert

Based on Isaiah 64.1-9 and Mark 13.24-37 (NRSV)

*I speak in the name of the one who loves us, the one who gives us light, the one who gives us life.
Amen.*

Best political party?

- I know that while a number of other countries have held elections recently - some of which has made it into our news - that the overt politics associated with electioneering hasn't impacted on us in Australia or Victoria recently.
- Nevertheless, the way that various state and federal governments have responded to the pandemic - with the challenge of finding a reasonable path between lives and livelihoods, between the health of people and the health of the economy - has attracted a great deal of political commentary.
- And so I have found my news feed almost bombarded with scathing attacks on our state premier Daniel Andrews, or on our prime minister Scott Morrison, and then with attacks in turn on those who initiated the criticism.
- Over the years I have come to appreciate that most political parties have commendable policies alongside others which might appear to be damaging.
- The bottom line is that most, if not all, governments don't look out very well for all of the marginalised - for the people doing it tough in all the variety of ways that people might struggle.
- When it comes to matters of social justice, governments might address some aspects here or there, might improve the lot of some of those who are suffering from social injustice;
- However, as long as they keep their core voters happy - the ones who pay taxes or who benefit from social welfare - then the rest do not really count - the rest won't make a difference to whether a government will continue into a second term, or be replaced again.

The powers in the heavens

- During the time of Isaiah, Isaiah not only speaks the word of God to God's people, he also speaks the word of the people to God.
- And Isaiah speaks out on behalf of those who are suffering from injustice.
- But he does so - not from a position of righteousness, but from a position of admitting Israel's sin in not following the will of God.
- Not only in not following the will of God, but in not even calling on the name of God: he says: *There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you*
- But he acknowledges God as the potter, and God's people as the clay, and the work of God's hand.
- And asks God to make himself known anew - but not in a gentle fashion:
- *that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence - to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!*
- It is this awesome presence that Jesus speaks of when he talks about *the powers in the heavens being shaken*.
- Because ultimately, whether we have a Labour government, or a Liberal or Liberal-coalition government, or even perhaps a Green government - none of them will be perfect, none of them will get it completely right - all of them have been, and will be - flawed.
- All of them have been, and will be, unwilling or unable, to treat both citizens and strangers as having equal worth, to treat those in prison with the same dignity as those not in prison, to ensure the provision of homes and work for all, to cater for all who are sick in body, mind or spirit.

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Hope in God's way

- But for those who have been overlooked by government, Jesus brings a word of hope.
- When it appears that nothing will ever change, God brings change.
- God brings new hope - the hope of an order wherein those who are suffering injustice will receive justice.
- And it is no good trying to predict when this will happen - it's no good saying: it will happen with the Labour party in power; or it will happen with the Liberal party in power; or it will happen when, hypothetically, the Greens might one day form a government.
- No - all these need to pass away - none of these can provide the heaven on earth that we pray for, that we are working towards.
- All current ways of governing will come to an end when God's way is given priority.

Keep actively alert

- And Jesus reminds us to keep alert, to remain vigilant.
- In his parable, the man who is on a journey puts his slaves or servants in charge, each with their work.
- We are those servants.
- We have our work to do - we have our part to play.
- Which means what?
- I would suggest it means that when it comes to government, that until God's kingdom reigns fully, our duty is still primarily to God.
- So whether or not our current government is what we voted for, when the government of the day gets it right in caring for the thirsty, the hungry, the stranger, the naked & homeless, those who are sick or in prison, then they deserve our support with that.
- And when our government gets it wrong, and acts without compassion and does not exercise good stewardship, then we need to stand with and on behalf of those who suffer the consequent injustice.
- Jesus reminds us: *keep awake - for you do not know when the master of the house will come, ... or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'*
- We need to keep alert for the appearance of the one we name as King of kings and Lord of lords, and live and work as if we are already in his kingdom, as if we are citizens of something much greater than the state of Victoria, much greater than the Commonwealth of Australia.
- Because we know we are.

*Eternal God,
through long generations you prepared a way
for the coming of your Son,
and by your Spirit you still bring light to illumine our paths:
renew us in faith and hope
that we may welcome Christ to rule our thoughts
and claim our love;
to whom be glory for ever. Amen*