
³⁴ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Luke 13:34-35

But our citizenship is in heaven,
and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:20

Over the past few weeks in the news there have been several events that have caused people to stop and wonder "What does the future hold?" Certainly the conviction of George Pell (and all that surrounds it) has caused some to think about 'the future' of 'the church'. But we may also look at events occurring in the U.K. or U.S. or recently in New Zealand (with the shooting at the mosque) and wonder what the future holds.

We may face other fears, and they're not over what might happen. Businesses shut their doors. Economic uncertainty. We also wrestle with personal crises: the lump discovered on a breast, divorce papers served, a wayward teen who felt the tug into rebellion. Fear for the future can easily overwhelm us these days

Have you ever felt like you don't know what to do next? Like you're at a crossroad? You feel stuck, like you're paralysed, insecure and unsure of your next step. Do you ever fear the future because you have no idea what you're supposed to do?

When it comes to 'the future' of 'the church' we also may have some fears. Within Australia, in the past century we have moved from almost 100% of people identifying as 'Christian' to currently just around 50%. Many church groups have felt this keenly with declining worship attendances. There are many who are fearful for the 'future' of 'the church'. But should 'fear' motivate us? Is fear a good motivator for dealing with issues?

Anxiety, as many of you know, is a real issue facing many people today. Everyone experiences anxiety and fear at times; they are normal and helpful human emotions that help us deal with danger. However, some people experience excessive anxiety, and worries that become ongoing and distressing and that interfere with their daily lives. This may indicate an anxiety disorder. Often there appears to be no obvious or logical reason for the way the person feels. This may make an anxiety disorder even more worrying to the sufferer.

Anxiety disorders are real. The main features of an anxiety disorder are fears or thoughts that are chronic (constant) and distressing and that interfere with daily living. When we're very anxious, we have intense feelings of worry or distress that are not easy to control. Anxiety can interfere with how we go about our everyday lives, and make it hard to cope with 'normal' challenges. Anxiety is the most common mental health condition in Australia. Up to one-third of women and one-fifth of men will experience anxiety at some point in their lives.

The giant chasm which exists between faith and mental health would suggest that this will always be a difficult topic to discuss. Many Christians do not understand how these two things, God and Anxiety Disorders could possibly co-exist. But it is important to remember that having anxiety is not a reflection of a lack of faith.

How do you cope with facing the future? One Philosopher once said, *"If you are depressed you are living in the past. If you are anxious you are living in the future. If you are at peace you are living in the present."* I have to say, personally, I don't find this all that helpful. Sometimes 'having the right mindset is really difficult. I saw a quote recently that said, *"I'm exhausted from trying to be stronger than I feel."* And it really hit me; we live in a world that teaches things like "fake it till you make it" and "love heals all wounds". But the truth is that those lovely little phrases don't always work.

When we come to our Scriptures for today, they all speak in some way about 'facing the future'. In our First Reading (Genesis 15:1-12,17-18) we have the account of God coming to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." Note the first word of this vision: "Do not fear". This is a phrase that God uses again and again with His people. Why does God say this? The answer is simple: people do 'fear', and 'fear' not in the sense of reverential awe. Rather, they are simply afraid.

The Bible mentions two specific types of fear. The first type is beneficial and is to be encouraged. The second type is a detriment and is to be overcome. The first type of fear is fear of the Lord. This type of fear does not necessarily mean to be afraid of something. Rather, it is a reverential awe of God; a reverence for His power and glory. However, it is also a proper respect for His wrath and anger. In other words, the fear of the Lord is a total acknowledgement of all that God is, which comes through knowing Him and His attributes.

Fear of the Lord brings with it many blessings and benefits. It is the beginning of wisdom and leads to good understanding (Psalm 111:10). Only fools despise wisdom and discipline (Proverbs 1:7). Furthermore, fear of the Lord leads to life, rest, peace, and contentment (Proverbs 19:23). It is the fountain and life (Proverbs 14:27) and provides a security and a place of safety for us (Proverbs 14:26).

However, sometimes we are afraid, sometimes this “spirit of fear” overcomes us, and to overcome it we need to trust in and love God completely. “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18). No one is perfect, and God knows this. That is why He has liberally sprinkled encouragement against fear throughout the Bible. Beginning in the book of Genesis and continuing throughout the book of Revelation, God reminds us to “Fear not.”

In our Gospel this day we have the account of some Pharisees coming to Jesus saying, “Get you out, and go from here, for Herod desires to kill you.” We do not know how genuine this warning was. Perhaps these were Pharisees who admired Him. But it may simply be that they hoped by this means to frighten Him off and prevent Him from carrying on with His work.

But Jesus replies without fear. As in His reply to John the Baptist He points to His signs and wonders. He said, “Go and say to that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I am perfected.’”

And then Jesus says, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

If God is the speaker in the lament over Jerusalem (as indeed, Jesus is God among us), the picture of a hen gathering her brood under her wings becomes a deeply moving portrait of God. Here we find a picture of a gracious God who is like a hen making repeated attempts to gather her chicks under her wings.

There is something in our Lord's words which demands the attention of all Christians. There is a frame of mind exhibited to us which we should do well to copy. Our Lord, no doubt, spoke with a prophetic foresight of coming things. He knew the time of His own death, and He knew that this time was not yet come.

Foreknowledge like this, of course, is not granted to believers in the present day. But still there is a lesson here which we ought not to overlook. We ought, in a certain measure, to aim at having the mind that was in Christ Jesus. We ought to seek to possess a spirit of calm, unshaken confidence about things to come. We should study to have a heart “not afraid of evil tidings,” but quiet, steady, and trusting in the Lord. (Psalm 112:7.)

In the Holy Gospel for today, we see two aspects of Jesus’ character come to the forefront: 1) He is a man on a mission. And 2) He is a man of compassion. Hear this compassion in Jesus’ voice, as his heart aches for the city that will reject him and kill him: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your

children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'" And, of course, that day was the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem to suffer and die on the cross.

Throughout Lent we are preparing ourselves to experience Jesus' cross. This passage calls us to do so by considering whether our lives lead appropriately to that cross. Can we make sense of our lives as a part of the establishment of God's kingdom in our world? Or are we frightened from our mission by the threats of earthly things?

"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1). "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control." (Philippians 3:20-21). Let us learn from these verses, how entirely our times are in God's hands.

Nobody likes discomfort along the journey of life. That's why we coin little sayings to help us along the way like, "I can stand anything as long as I can whine about it," or "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." Neither of these sayings, however, fits our Saviour's situation in Luke 13. He has signed on willingly for a journey whose path He knows will be littered with resistance, rejection, and likely death. But He is not whining. He is lamenting. The context is an intense love for people. 'God loves you unconditionally, wholeheartedly and continually.' This is God's love for you in Jesus. Amen.