

SERMON FOR THE DIOCESE OF BUNBURY 16/11/2025: GEOFF CHADWICK:

OS 33c SUNDAY BETWEEN 13 AND 19 NOVEMBER:

LK 21:5-19

“SCARS”

Luke 21.5-19

⁵ When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ⁶ ‘As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.’ ⁷ They asked him, ‘Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?’ ⁸ And he said, ‘Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, “I am he!” and, “The time is near!” Do not go after them. ⁹ ‘When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.’ ¹⁰ Then he said to them, ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; ¹¹ there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven. ¹² ‘But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. ¹³ This will give you an opportunity to testify. ¹⁴ So make up your minds not to prepare your defence in advance; ¹⁵ for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all because of my name. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your souls.

One of the things we must remember when we hear these “apocalyptic: portions of Luke’s Gospel is that the first hearers had lived through these events.

We must remember that Luke’s church existed after the horrific events of AD70 when the Temple was destroyed and many had been *brought before kings and governors because of [Jesus’] name*. (Lk 21, 12, NRSV).

Whilst the words are a warning on Jesus’ lips before these events, Lk’s church is hearing them after the events, and in a sense, is being encouraged for their faithfulness during those horrid times.

Jesus may be looking forwards, but Luke’s church is looking back.

I wonder if you've ever had that experience?

You've been through an awful time in your life, and you wonder how you're going to survive. Sometime later, looking back, you realise you've survived, and just can't quite figure out how. But survive you did, and now you've moved on.

Except, we rarely move on unaffected. There will be scars, there will be wounds, there will be learnings. Sometimes we think we've left all the scars behind, then something catches us out and we're right back in the wound of the old pain.

On the other hand, there are occasions where the scars remain scars- that is, the wound has healed over, and although it's left its mark, the pain is gone.

I get a sense that this is what the early church was feeling when it looked back on the apocalypse of AD 70. The temple had been destroyed, much of the population had either been killed or dispersed by the Romans, and the land was rendered barren.

How would you respond to these events?

Twenty years later, Luke's church was attempting to come to terms with what had happened. For some members the scars were still wounds, and for others the scars, were scars- healed - yes a reminder of what had gone on but with little pain remaining.

The passage is full of these scars:

- The Temple stones being thrown down
- False heralds
- Famine
- Arrests
- Family betrayal
- And the inability to speak coherently

Yet, the final verse breathes a word of hope into all of this chaos:

¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your souls. (Lk 18-19, NRSV)

It's a reminder:

Yes we survived!

I am reminded of a little book by Henre Nouwen called *The Wounded Healer* (2010, 2nd ed., Image Double Day, New York.)

Nouwen reflects on the adequacy or otherwise of the helping professions. He concludes that:

Nothing can be written about ministry without a deeper understanding of the ways in which ministers can make their own wounds available as a source of healing. (p 4)

Or putting it another way, all of us have been wounded by life in one way or another, and what's most effective in ministry is brining that common woundedness to the pastoral encounter.

That doesn't mean saying to someone:

"Something like that happened to me once!"

as this is ineffective counter story.

What it does mean is bringing your own sense of woundedness to resonate with the other.

As Nouwen puts it.

"Who can save a child from a burning house without taking the risk of being hurt by the flames? Who can listen to a story of loneliness and despair without taking the risk of experiencing similar pains in his own heart and even losing his precious peace of mind? In short: "Who can take away suffering without entering it?" (p78)

Importantly, there is a rule of thumb that you can only be as effective in ministry to the extent you have addressed your own pain. For example, if you have never grieved, you are unlikely

to help another grieve well. In fact, if you have scars, that are still wounds, your unresolved pain is likely to halt any effective encounter.

That's why, in our ministry formation processes, (training of clergy) we encourage the students to recognize, learn from, and come to terms with the pain and scars of their lives.

Again Nouwen says it beautifully:

...And if priests and ministers think that more skill training is the solution for the problem of Christian leadership, they may end up being more frustrated and disappointed than the leaders of the past. More training and structure are just as necessary as more bread for the hungry. But just as bread given without love can bring war instead of peace, professionalism without compassion will turn forgiveness into a gimmick, and the kingdom to come, into a blindfold." (p46)

So how's it going for you?

Are you in pain? Is someone you know in pain?

Are you in need of compassion?

Does someone you know need compassion?

The answer, of course, is yes!

But before we go blundering in, offering ineffectual platitudes or advice, let's look to our own wounds first. As we look, let us remember the scars that have been healed. These then must surely become our tools for hope.

Luke's church survived an unimaginable disaster. The scars are in the text. They are also in the texts of our own lives. Jesus said:

¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your souls. (Lk 18-19, NRSV)

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**