**Sermon Stowe – Easter 5 2022 - 2 Peter 3: 1-18 & Mk 13: 14-23**

Both our readings today are about looking to the future and what will happen. I want to begin by telling you a story that might be true about expectations for the future. It’s about two sons of John Rockefeller, the oil magnate. Her wanted his sons to realise what real work was like so he sent them to one of his oil fields to work alongside the common labourers so they knew what it was like at the other end of the company. They worked there for 2 years. They worked long hours and it was hard, and very hot from being covered with oil all day and they ended each day exhausted from the work. One night as they sat with the others talking and trading stories one of the workers asked one of the Rockefeller boys how he liked working with them. “I love it. This is one of the best times of my life,” he said. The guy who asked the question said, with sarcasm, “That’s because you know you’re not staying. You know there is something better waiting for you when all this is over.”

Now I know it’s not a perfect analogy but there is an element of truth in that story if we take Jesus’ teaching about his Second Coming seriously. That’s what Peter was talking about in the passage we heard read. The first thing to realise is that the early Christian Church expected that the world would dramatically and painfully end very soon. Even though we know from the perspective of 2022 that that expectation was wrong, it was helpful at the time because it gave a sense of urgency and energy to the evangelism after Jesus’ resurrection and the formation and accelerated the growth of the church. They thought they didn’t have much time. 2000 years later, have we lost that energy and urgency? Sadly the answer is yes.

Returning to Peter’s letter, some of the people in the church latched onto the absence of the 2nd Coming and challenged the prediction of the end times and were disruptive of church life. Peter urged the leaders and members of the church to hold onto this expectation but told them to remember that time as we know it is not what God knows. Quote*:”With the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand year is like a day*.”

When we pray we often expect prayer to demonstrate cause and effect. We hope that as we pray, God listens and answers soon – in our time frame. It’s so easy to forget that our timescale is much more restricted that God’s who knows everything and whose timescale is eternity.

Back to our reading. Peter was convinced that God would bring the world to an end and graphically described what would happen. Well we know it didn’t happen in his lifetime or since but I have to say that what he described sounds awfully like what would happen if a large asteroid hit earth. He wrote *“The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare*.” The conclusion that Peter comes to, that applies to us just as much as it did to his hearers, is that since we don’t know when this will happen we should use the time available to us to prepare for it.

He wrote, “*Since then, dear friends, you are looking forward to this event, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him*.” What a challenge that is to each of us. Are you ready to face your maker? Are you at peace with all those around you? Are you at peace with the environment and the way you use its resources?

If we are honest we know that we fail to follow God’s way and will in so many ways – both big and small but Peter assures us, referring back to St Paul’s writing, that if we confess and repent, that is turn away from the sinful things we consciously or unconsciously do, we will be forgiven by God. I think the message from this passage in Peter’s letters is that we should take seriously the possibility of the end time coming while we are here on earth It should be an incentive to our Christian life – not only for the way we live our lives but also the way we encourage others to do the same; to realise the reality of God our creator and to decide to follow the way of Jesus and live loving lives that try, within our humanity, to mimic him. Peter wrote *“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him be glory now and forever. AMEN.”*

Sorry but that’s not the end of my sermon. I need to talk about the Mark passage and what Jesus said. This passage comes in the middle of what is known as The Little Apocalypse. Jesus predicted what would happen to Jerusalem when it was attacked and besieged. And he was absolutely correct. Those living in Jerusalem were warned to leave as the Romans approached in AD70 as part of their campaign to put down a Jewish revolt. If they had left for the countryside even if they had nowhere to go and no support they would have made a good choice. Josephus, a historian writing at the time writes that the siege was brutal and long. He estimated that over 1 million people died of cruel starvation and the sword and 100 000 were captured and enslaved. Jerusalem was literally taken to pieces and destroyed as a punishment to the Jewish nation which was exported and forbidden to return. Jesus predicted this would be triggered by some artefact would be placed in the Temple that provoked the Jews so much there was a rebellion. We don’t know what Jesus had in mind. He called it the “*Abomination that causes desolation – let the reader understand*”. The problem is that this reader, and all others before, does not understand. Was Jesus warning against a person claiming to be Messiah who would mislead his people into an unwinnable rebellion? Certainly the last paragraph of our reading warns against false prophets and false messiahs who will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive. Was the underlying message was that Christians should pick their battles very carefully and choose those that were critical and life changing and eschew those that were not winnable. That would seem to be good advice. We can never know but let Putin beware.

So our two readings tell us three things.

* That the Second Coming of Jesus will happen – it will become a reality.
* That time is unknown but it will be decisive and catastrophic.
* And that there will be great confusion and many misleading leaders will deceive people for their own advantage.

I suggest that we conclude that we cannot just sit on our hands and wait for the end time to happen. We are called to be resurrection people who do their best to follow Jesus and lead others to follow him. Doing nothing is not acceptable or wise because we are resurrection people. Resurrection is the foundation on which our Christian lives are based. We live believing that there is a better place that we, the forgiven, will go to when our days on this earth are finished. If our belief is real that hope of our resurrection must affect our lives and show in what we are and what we do irrespective of the consequences or result.

And finally, another story to finish; A US Coast Guard unit, a rescue boat and its crew, was stationed in New Jersey on the East coast of America. It was called out when a hurricane blew in from the Atlantic and a ship was grounded on the coast and was breaking up. The Commander of the boat called his men together and told them to prepare to go to sea. One of the young recruits protested, “But Captain, if we go out there we’ll never come back.” The captain answered “Son, you don’t have to come back. You have to go out.”

AMEN