

Hannah Chun is one of our Circuit's exciting new local preachers, and her sermon to the Cheam Methodist Church congregation on Remembrance Sunday was at the end of eventful news week. She drew on the day's scripture readings from Revelation 22:1-5 and Luke 21:5-19:

Sermon by Ms Hannah Chun on 13 November 2016

What a week in news it has been. First Trump, then the Croydon tram incident. There has been fear, grief, anger, confusion, division and uncertainty plastered all over the news and media. On 9th November, the world woke up to the news that Donald Trump had been elected as the next president of the United States of America. I had to pinch myself to see if I was dreaming.

For many this is a victory and a sign of freedom, but for others it clearly feels like it is the end of the world, the end of freedom, and a doorway to more oppression and hatred. Some feel as though the world has turned upside down, while others feel as though their candidate is the nation's saviour. Thousands of people have taken to the streets in protest, hate crimes have risen rapidly and people are wondering what this all means. It is as though hate has overcome love and evil has conquered good.

The gospel lectionary for today, which falls on this first Sunday following the US presidential election seems to be a poignant text in such a time. In the light of what Jesus said in the gospel passage, how are we to make sense of all that is going on?

The passage begins with the disciples admiring the beauty of the temple. It is beautifully decorated. It is resplendent and boasts power, authority and grandeur. Yet Jesus diverts their attention away from their fascination with the 'things that they see' to something that he sees which is of more importance. He is in essence saying: 'All this grandeur and beauty might impress you, but the time is coming when every stone in that building will end up in a heap of rubble.'

These may have been devastating words to these people, because the temple was the heart and soul of Israel's worship. It was something they

looked up to and something their lives were focused and built around. To hear that all this would one day be thrown down might have been rather unnerving.

It is of significance that this passage follows right after the story of the widow's offering. Jesus compared a poor widow's giving of all she had though small, with the ostentatious and proud giving of the rich man. Maybe Jesus was trying to draw their attention to the fact, that though the temple looked beautiful and immaculate on the outside, inside, the temple system may have been corrupt and flawed, because they were not paying attention to what was truly important, one of those being caring for the poor, vulnerable and outcast of society.

Jesus appears to be warning them about being too fixated on temporary human institutions, because something even as beautiful and magnificent as the temple, which may appear to be a trustworthy institution will not last forever and will eventually be reduced to nothing.

‘Where and what our eyes are fixed on means everything. Do we see what and whom Jesus sees?’ Jesus saw the lowly widow, whilst the people only saw the obvious splendour of the temple. ‘If our eyes are fixed on what is temporary, we might miss seeing the things that last. If we only see the outward beauty and grandeur of things, we may easily overlook the beauty in things that seem unattractive on the surface. If we only focus on what is negative, damaging and destructive we might miss focusing on the positive, encouraging and constructive.’

In the aftermath of the Trump election, whenever I had a moment I found myself on my phone following all the newsfeeds on the post-Trump election. It was all extremely negative and damaging, and brought upon a sense of fear about what was to come. I felt I was sucked into this wave of fear and anger that the rest of the world was feeling, and have to admit feeling the same despair and disappointment in the status quo. I had to intentionally take a step back in an attempt to see it all objectively.

Human institutions can fail us. Human achievements can fail us. Leaders whom we look up to can fail and disappoint us. The point that Jesus seems to making here is that trustworthy institutions may crumble and fall, but in contrast God is utterly trustworthy to the core.

Jesus here has his face set towards Jerusalem, and in next week's lectionary he too as the temple fell, will fall and be torn down at Golgotha. But the hope is this, that though Jesus fell, he rose again for us. And Jesus the temple of God will not be shaken and will stand beside us to the end even when the world appears to crumble down around us.

When asked when the temple will fall and the signs to look out for, Jesus paints a grim picture of days to come, much as we see today of wars, dissensions, earthquakes and plagues. Those in Luke's community who heard this passage at the time suffered much oppression and discrimination and would have recognised this type of passage as one used deliberately to help believers struggling from oppression and persecution to find comfort that God would not abandon them and that God would ultimately prevail, encouraging believers to persevere in the meantime.

“Despite the seemingly disheartening nature of the language and imagery used by Jesus, this is actually a passage deeply grounded and rooted in hope. Hope that God remains present in the world and in one's life, even when it feels as though the world is closing in on us.”

Each year around this time John Lewis produces a TV Christmas advertisement. This year's ad starts with a dog and ends with a dog, and is absolutely delightful. You may have already seen it. I always find there is a deeper message in each John Lewis Christmas ad and this year's one I found to be particularly moving and pertinent in the light of all that is going on.

It is a story about a little girl called Bridget who loves to bounce and about a boxer named Buster who always watches her bouncing on her bed. For Christmas her parents buy her a trampoline, which Bridget's dad assembles outside in the garden after she has gone to bed. It's in the middle of the night and two foxes appear into the garden. They climb onto the trampoline and discovering that its rather bouncy start bouncing to their hearts delight. Then, startled by a badger who appears, they stop bouncing. But not for long, for the three of them start bouncing together. Soon a squirrel and a hedgehog join in the bouncing too, and Buster the dog is seen watching all this longingly from inside the house. If you would like to know what happens in the end, do watch it for yourself to find out.

Watching these different species of animals bouncing together in one accord, I had a glimpse of what freedom might look like. What acceptance of difference might look like. What unity might look like. And what hope might look like. Maybe I could be reading way too much into this ad, but to me it spoke of the hope and faith we can have in a God who is seated on the throne. That we can rest on the hope that one day nations will stand together with nations and kingdoms stand side by side with other kingdoms, for God ultimately longs to bring about the healing of the nations. If this isn't the reason we can hope against hope in our present circumstances I'm not sure what else is.

Finally, in times of persecution, hardship and injustice, Jesus says such times are an opportunity to testify. Many of us, unlike some other Christians around the world do not face the intense persecutions that Jesus speaks of. In fact, our culture isn't altogether hostile to the Christian faith, rather it is indifferent. And indifference I believe makes it harder at times to witness, because people just don't want to know. It is awfully hard to testify to a God that people can't see, especially when there are 'beautiful temples' right before them that they can see. Yet, we are called to go against the tide that speaks against hope and peace and 'to pierce through what seems to be beyond hope' so that others will encounter this everlasting hope that is in you and me.

Most importantly, may we remember that before we can be a channel of peace and hope to others, it must begin in us. Peace and hope begins with us. What, if any, are the things that are at war inside you? Are there areas in your lives where hope has disintegrated? How can we come to a place of peace in our hearts with those we find difficult to be at peace with?

I would like to end with a true story about a man named Julio Diaz who was robbed at knifepoint but handled it in the most unexpected way. I feel his story speaks about what it might mean to be channels of Christ's peace and hope in the face of conflict and despair.

Julio Diaz, a social worker was going home after a long day's work, when he was stopped by a teenager who pulled out a knife. Thinking the teenager wanted his money he gave him his wallet. As the boy walked away, Diaz told him: "Hey, wait a minute. You forgot something. If

you're going to be robbing people for the rest of the night, you might as well take my coat to keep you warm.”

The boy looking confused asked, “What’s going on here, why are you doing this?”

Diaz replied: “If you’re willing to risk your freedom for a few dollars, then I guess you must really need the money. I mean, all I wanted to do was get dinner. If you really want to join me...you’re more than welcome.”

So they went to the dinner together.

When the bill arrived, Diaz told the teen: "Look, I guess you're going to have to pay for this bill 'cause you have my money and I can't pay for this. So if you give me my wallet back, I'll gladly treat you.”

The teen didn't even think about it and returned the wallet.

So Diaz got his wallet back and the teen got a free meal.

Diaz then gave him \$20 because he thought ‘who knows, it might help him’, and asked for something in return, which was his knife.

And the teen gave it to him.

Afterward, when Diaz told his mother what happened, she said: "You're the type of kid that if someone asked you for the time, you gave them your watch.”

And Diaz’ response was: “I figure, if you treat people right, you can only hope that they treat you right. It's as simple as it gets in this complicated world.”

(See the full story here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oOpsfbiJIA>)

Let us pray:

Let peace begin with us, O Lord;

let not our heart harbour hatred.
Help us to endure all things through faith;
foster hope in our innermost being,
and enable us to work for righteousness.

Amen.

(Prayer taken from *Roots* Issue 86 Nov/Dec 2016)

Sources used:

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3059

<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4750>