

24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: CCSY & CCGS, 15/11/09  
*1 Sam 1:4-10, 17-20; Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-8); Heb 10:19-25; Mk 13:1-8*

Have you been to see it yet? 2012, I mean. Add it to films like ‘The Day After Tomorrow’, ‘Deep Impact’, ‘The Perfect Storm’, ‘Dante’s Peak’, and ‘Category 7’, and you have but a handful of the literally hundreds of disaster movies made in the last half-century – the vast majority of which have been produced since 1990, although stretching all the way back to that 1928 classic of cinematography, ‘Noah’s Ark’ – remade, of course, in 1999. For the full list you can visit a webpage dedicated to this genre at that online source of all authority: Wikipedia. It seems we are increasingly obsessed with the end of the world, as though all of the natural human fears that go with change are projected onto some cataclysmic change, which is associated with our demise.

If Hollywood is the celluloid scribe of our own culture’s apocalyptic, or ‘end-time’ imaginings, the Bible houses another great stockpile of such stories. We have a good example in today’s gospel, where Jesus alerts his disciples to expect earthquakes, famines, wars, and strife – no wonder some religious people think the end is nigh, given what we see and hear on news bulletins. The writer to the Hebrews in our second reading was no different, urging his readers 2,000 years ago to prepare for the fast-approaching Day of the Lord.

These passages tend to come around at this time of year in the table of set weekly readings because we’re at that penultimate moment in the church’s year. Next Sunday, our feast of title, is the last Sunday of the Christian calendar: Christ the King. We hope you’ll come back and help celebrate our identity as Christ’s Church: School and Parish together, named for him. The Sunday after, 29 November, is Advent Sunday: the first day of a new church year – that season in which we prepare to marvel again at God’s nakedness: the story of how the kingdom of God – God’s reign of love, mercy, and justice – was embodied in that same Jesus of Nazareth, a child in weakness born, far-shadowed by a cross.<sup>1</sup>

The lead up to Christmas is a time of great anticipation and excitement, as the Marimba ensemble has just communicated. I think more people turned out yesterday to see the Myer Parade than did to see Tiger Woods! But being on the verge of any great moment or happening can also be a cause for trepidation, anxiety, even fear: what will this event bring? What will be different because of it? What might have to change in the world, or in me?

Mothers and expectant mothers know this mix of feelings. The motherhood of Hannah, whose story begins in our first reading and is continued in the psalm, is a kind of prototype for the motherhood of Mary. So too, Hannah’s Song is a template for Mary’s Song, which we know and will hear tonight at Evensong as the Magnificat. As Hannah exults in the Lord at the birth of Samuel, so Mary proclaims the greatness of the Lord at the prospect of her first born.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Together in Song*, 262 (the Gradual hymn), verse 1.

And yet, both of these children signify things about God's kingdom that are every bit as unsettling and confronting as they are comforting; promising change, reversal: The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength; those who were full search for bread, but those who are hungry are well fed. Or, as we know it better, perhaps, on Mary's lips: Casting down the mighty from their thrones, and lifting up the lowly, God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

Over the last two Fridays in Chapel we've been thinking about the Lord's Prayer. We talked about what praying for daily bread might mean: this bread of the coming kingdom of God, a kingdom which has no borders to protect, but grows wherever God's justice, love, and mercy reign in human hearts; a kingdom in which the feeble gird on strength and the hungry are fed with good things. What would have to be different in our world, our communities, our churches, our schools, our household – our own hearts – in order to taste this bread of tomorrow, today?

Spencer and Verity, baptised here with Paige two months ago, will taste that bread today for the first time as they are admitted to Communion: to that meal and that table which show us something of what this kingdom looks like; where there is room for everyone who approaches, and enough for all who hunger and thirst.

But what we do here is more than just an illustration of something we're striving for; it actually forms us, changes us, re-makes us into the sort of household, the sort of community, where all of our tables are as indiscriminately gracious as this one. And, liberating as ultimately that may be, it is also costly, because we don't really like change. And so we do need to meet together as the writer to the Hebrews reminds us, to practice this way of being, to encourage one another as we experience the birth pangs and the growing pains that are part and parcel of this coming kingdom.

Because the cataclysmic change that is God's Good News in Christ is not a story about the end of the world. When these things happen, Jesus tells his disciples, this is but the beginning of the birth pangs. This apocalyptic event is a story of beginnings, of the world's new creation in God's eternally creative Word made flesh.

I'm reliably told giving birth is painful. The joy of Hannah and Mary at the birth of their children is mingled with their awareness that, as a consequence, everything looks different. Likewise, the new and living way Jesus opened for us into the heart of the One he called Father involved the tearing of the curtain in the Temple, the rending that is, of his body. And so we begin to grasp that change is not something God does to us; rather, change is something God-in-Christ experiences with us, as that counter-intuitive Wisdom which risks everything in order to set us and all creatures free for the good we struggle to choose for ourselves. Dare we breathe the counter-cultural but ample air of hope in this season of endings and beginnings? Are we prepared to take our chance with God,<sup>2</sup> who takes such great chances with Hannah, and Mary, and with you and with me?

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<sup>2</sup> See *Together in Song*, 262 (the Gradual hymn), verses 3, 4.