

We are to live and work with vision for the coming of God's kingdom on earth – Luke 21:5-19

This morning later in the service, following our prayers for the world, we will again utter in the Lord's Prayer, the words Jesus taught us to pray: "*your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.*" But our familiarity with these words may sometimes blind us to the radical nature of this petition Jesus calls us to pray.

In his book '*The Lord's Prayer: Bridge to a Better World*', Sri Lankan lawyer Christopher Weeramantry, a former judge of the International Court of Justice, suggests there is a tendency to leave this prayer petition at the level of a spiritual ideal rather than see it as a practical call to action to make what we long for a reality. Weeramantry writes: "*One does not passively intone the hope that God's kingdom come on earth. One actively works toward it. One makes it come on earth.*" (We will return to the prayer shortly)

I recall once reading a statement by Catholic theologian John Shea that "*the opposite of love is not hate, but the words 'I no longer care'*" Whether or not we agree, it does serve to highlight the debilitating effect despondency, indifference or despair can have when people lose hope, feeling that whatever they do, won't make a difference.

Out of my own experience, I recall the hope/excitement I felt when, back in June 2000, with 300-400,000 other Australians committed to reconciliation, I walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge – (along with others in all capital cities including those in Canberra who walked over Commonwealth Avenue Bridge that day.) I sense many of us felt we may have turned a corner that day in the long road toward reconciliation with the First peoples of this Land and the healing of our nation's soul, only to see those hopes dashed by the response of our political leaders.

In their despondency, those committed to the reconciliation process found it difficult to recreate that commitment or spirit within the psyche of our nation, until the day of the National Apology to the 'stolen generations' by Kevin Rudd in February 2008. But sadly, again, we still have a long way to go following policies implemented by successive governments such as what has come to be known as the 'Northern Intervention'.

Indeed, especially after the last couple of election campaigns, I sense many Australians are beginning to question whether it really matters who gets in or not and, as individuals, whether our vote really matters; questioning whether we can make a difference. Could John Shea be right? The greatest threat to our world is not the passion of hatred, but a passive indifference where people give up hope things in their lives and world can ever really change, and begin to feel "I no longer care."

Such despondency was the concern facing the prophet Isaiah in this morning's reading from the Hebrew Scriptures. Isaiah's people had finally been freed from exile in Babylon and returned home. Whilst in exile they had longed for the day when they could once more be in Jerusalem, and now, around two generations later, they were finally there only to discover a scene of absolute desolation. The temple was completely destroyed, the city long abandoned and the farmlands overgrown by weeds. One can almost hear the words forming on their lips; "What's the point, I no longer care." But in order to give encouragement and hope to his people, in the midst of their despondency, Isaiah revealed a bright new vision:

"For look, (says the Lord), I am going to create new heavens and a new earth, the past will not be remembered and will come no more to mind. Rather be joyful, be glad forever at what I am creating."

In the same way, in this morning's Gospel reading, Jesus seeks to give his followers encouragement and hope to endure rejection, persecution without losing their vision of what God can achieve in their world.

You may or may not agree with me, but I sometimes wonder if, in our own time, the greatest threat to the church and other institutions in our society is not animosity, but a lethargy and disconnectedness

where people feel so swamped by the media, impersonal technological advances, and the pressure to maintain their standard of living, that both individually and corporately we have lost a vision of what we may be as a people and feel powerless to make a difference anyway.

More than ever our society needs visionaries; people who have a vision of ‘new heavens and a new earth’, and yet our current politicians seem only to be judged on their managerial skills – how well they manage the economy or avoid controversy, rather than their ability to inspire communities. Our political leaders have become masters of the seven second ‘sound bite’ for the TV news, offering up slogans rather than articulating soundly developed policy for the issues of our time.

And so that is our calling as Christian community; to keep alive as Isaiah and Jesus did, a vision of what the world could be if we are faithful to God’s rule of justice and love. The greatest contribution we as the Christian community can make to the lives of the people with whom we live and our world is a vision of what might be, and the hope and belief that it can happen, the belief that together we can make a difference. Let me tell you a story:

One day a wild dove landed on the branch of a fir tree to rest, when along the branch scuttled a field mouse and sat down beside her. “What is the weight of a snowflake?” the field mouse asked the wild dove. “Why, nothing, nothing more than nothing is the weight of a snowflake” came the reply. “Why do you ask?”

“Well,” said the field mouse, “one day I was sitting on a branch of a fir tree, just like this one, close to the trunk, when it began to snow; oh, not heavily, not in a raging blizzard, but gently, just gently one by one.”

“Since I had nothing else to do at the time, I began to count them one by one as they dropped gently on my branch. Their number was exactly 3,741, 952, when one more snowflake fell on the branch – nothing more than nothing as you say – but the branch broke under its extra weight.” With that, the field mouse scuttled away leaving the dove to ponder on what she had heard.

The dove, an authority on such matters since the time of Noah, thought to herself, “Perhaps there is need for just one more person to speak out before peace can become a reality in our world.”

And so we return to the Lord’s Prayer and the petition: “*your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*” Commenting on this petition Weeramantry reaffirms Jesus’ belief these two worlds – the realm of God and our world – can be fused together to achieve the transformation longed for by God. He goes on “*‘Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ acquires a new significance... The individual can no longer wring his or her hands in helplessness, pleading that matters of global import are beyond the reach of his or her individual conduct.*”

And there are ways for us to act. For example, at 11.00 am this morning in Garema Place a rally has been organized for us to make it clear Australians want stronger action on climate change. Later this month UnitingCare is organizing a rally, protesting the detention of children who have come to our shores seeking asylum. And in March next year we will have opportunity to participate in a week of prayer and fasting, including a prayer vigil outside Parliament House, seeking justice for the First peoples of this Land.

So then, let us catch hold of Isaiah’s vision of the ‘*new heavens and a new earth*’ God is creating within our world and with enthusiasm pledge our selves to work for its coming. Let us *care* about what we want for our own lives, our families, our nation and our world and work for it, praying: “*your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.*” Amen