

Sermon - October 17, 2021
The Rev'd Canon Dr. Lorne Mitchell

Loving God,

May our reflections on scripture this day, inspire us to be strong followers of Jesus in both word and deed. Amen.

Today, from the Gospel of Mark we hear,

10:42 So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

10:43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant...

Former Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsay wrote that there come ages in history when God seems to shake the whole world - ages in which everything appears to be turning upside-down. Our Gospels tell us the story of such an age.

Into a hierarchically ordered, highly structured Roman Empire came a man called Jesus. He didn't have any armies or weapons or official titles. He was just a teacher. Some believed he was a prophet, some believed he was the long-awaited Messiah, others saw him more as a troublemaker. But what was evident to all was that his teachings threatened to turn their nicely ordered society

upside-down and inside-out. Which is, of course, what happened.

For Jesus said that the first shall be last and the last first, that the poor would inherit the kingdom of heaven. He said that God rejoiced much more over one repentant sinner, than over the righteous lives of 99 good people. He preferred the company of society's outcasts - the lepers, the disfigured, the impure, the handicapped. He spoke openly with women, a social taboo in his society, and ate with known sinners. He referred to the religious elite as a brood of vipers, and called ordinary folk like fisherman to be his chosen disciples. Crowds of adults were taught that the way to heaven was to become like a child. He said that those who wished to lead needed to become servants of others.

Those who were afraid of him tried to get rid of him by hanging him on a cross. But those who believed in him were transformed. Jesus shook them up; turned them in a new direction. They could not go back to the way they were. It was a hard decision, for, in the first 300 years particularly, Christians were often hunted down, exiled, and murdered. History may tend toward romanticizing the lives of these early Christians, but their lives were full of upheaval and suffering and violence. Shaken to the core. Yet it was through this shaking that they discovered, a depth of life, of joy, of love. They discovered what was UNshakeable.

And WE are the spiritual descendants of those people.

This image of being shaken to the core is, I believe a very fitting image for commenting on our age. For we are living in a time of being shaken. We are being shaken to the core of our being. We are experiencing massive changes in all facets of modern life, changes that are occurring at a frightening rate.

Technological advances are happening so fast that we can scarcely keep up, much less understand and reflect upon it. We are horrified by the violence we see returning to Afghanistan; we are shocked by massive industry of human trafficking – which is nothing less than the modern version of slavery. Environmental problems seem to lurk around every corner. And for two years a global pandemic has isolated us, divided us, and killed millions of people... Many are feeling exhausted, angry or depressed. It's easy to start identifying with Job... is this frustration and suffering ever going to end?

No one is escaping the effects of all this... There's no doubt - like Job, we are being shaken. And yet... times of being shaken can also be times of reflection, inner growth and opportunity...

As we move through this time it's helpful to realize that other people in previous ages have been through this before... Our holy scriptures, written ages ago invites us to believe that this shaking of our lives, our structures and

institutions – like Job - is for a purpose. Perhaps this is an opportunity to rediscover, those things which can NOT be shaken... those things which are truly important and truly valuable.

What is it in ourselves and in our society that is ultimately important, that cannot finally be shaken?

Our society tells us that money and good looks and possessions and power are ultimately important and undeniably what we need most.

Holy Scriptures tell us that it is God's love for us that cannot be shaken; that the truth of Jesus Christ holds an eternal and unshakable truth. To know and humbly live God's love is what we need most.

Which one are you going to put your trust in?

Part of our spiritual journey as Christian people is to help one another discover and experience for ourselves the truth of this second claim.

Our society, our world is tying itself in knots trying to find those things which won't crumble, which won't finally fade away, things that will provide real fulfilment and profound satisfaction.

It is the love of God that shall endure forever. It is the truth

of Jesus Christ that will not fade away. It is the Gospel message of love and forgiveness that provides real fulfilment. It is in following the Gospel teachings that will lead us to profound satisfaction and meaning.

Perhaps these tumultuous times are here to push us, to draw us into a new and better way ; to compel us, to invite us to reflect again upon the Gospel message , the Good News, as difficult and challenging as it can be; to re-dedicate ourselves, our lives to following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ... To learn to walk humbly with our God and God's creation.

We may have some tough decisions ahead of us, but we are promised, without a shadow of a doubt - the path that Jesus has revealed to us, will lead us through these times in which everything seems to be shaken and hopeless. Hold one another, encourage one another, serve one another, pray with one another...

Walk the path of Jesus - trust the path he offers - and you will be guided by what is unshakable and infinitely hopeful.

Amen.