

There was a time when the cooks in the congregation at this time of the year would hear a prayer beginning, "Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your faithful people" to take it as an instruction to make the Christmas pudding! It has a deeper concern for this time of the year and our Christian life.

The gospel gives us hints about the deeper concerns. Jesus, was speaking in the temple to his disciples in what would be his last week before his death. He had spoken about the destruction of the temple and rumours of wars. He spoke too of the coming of the Son of Man. We take that to mean a second coming.

He warned no one knows "about that day" except the Father. When he spoke about "that day" Jesus sounded like one of the old prophets. Amos spoke of the day of the Lord being "a day of darkness, not light" (Amos 5:18-20) or Zephaniah, "That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish." (Zeph.1:15) The three short stories Jesus told have a sense of distress because people are not ready when the Son of Man, Jesus, comes.

Even with his first coming people were not prepared. So on the Friday when he was crucified, when a physical darkness came over the land for three hours, the disciples were distressed. All their expectations of Jesus the Messiah, crashed.

When Matthew recorded the saying of Jesus it was a different time. It was long after the resurrection. There was an expectation that Jesus would return. Paul reminded the Thessalonians in his letter, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." (1 Thess.5:2) The very words Matthew records as spoken by Jesus. People needed to be alert and ready.

Over the last few months, we have heard of thieves breaking into homes in the night, frightening people with knives. That is distressing, but so probably was a thief digging a hole in the clay used to build your house. Jesus probably knew of such occasions. He told his listeners that if the owner knew what was going to happen he would stay awake. Likewise people are to be alert for his return.

There is also the danger that people have a great time at parties, share natural events like marriages, births, other celebrations and even just day to day shopping or housework, car maintenance, gardening. They don't notice the dark clouds gathering in the sky which is an omen of great rains, or approaching bush fire. That is what happened in the days of Noah. Life went on without any thought of looking to God. Although the scripture speaks of the Lord seeing 'the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth' (Genesis 6:5), Jesus isn't talking about the wickedness he is concerned about people having a good time they are not prepared for a judgement from God.

For those who are prepared for some disaster, they may be with someone who works with them. In all appearances they are together; then they are separated. In the tragedy of war the invading soldiers takes one off with them and the other is left to escape. It

may also be they are separated because of their attitudes towards others. Many Christians have come to a point in their lives where they are aware they are having no influence or feel alienated in a group. The values we have as Christians set us apart from many attitudes in society. The extreme being misogyny, racism, and violent extremism. We are trying to grow in the pattern of Jesus. We seek to serve God known in Jesus Christ.

When the news last Tuesday showed the flood in Thailand with people on the top of the apartment towers, I was reminded of a story. There was a flood coming to the town and people were advised to evacuate. That has happened in Australia a few times this year. A bus drove down the road picking up people to take them to safety. In one house the man called out, "I'm okay. God's looking after me." A few hours later, the man was at the window of the second floor. A boat came to rescue him. Again he said, "God's looking after me." By the next morning he was on the roof of his house. A helicopter came and he waved them away. Then, he drowned. He arrived in heaven. He told God, "I thought you were looking after me." God replied, "I sent a bus, a boat and a helicopter, I could do no more."

God intended us to have a relationship with him. It was a relationship where we may ask for God's help. "Save me, O God," said the psalmist and be aware of his help. Yet by living without any sense of God, we spoilt God's intended relationship. He sent his Son to show us his nature or character of forgiveness, generosity, reconciled in love. It was at his great cost. He can do no more. There will be a judgement. It will be given by his Son who suffered from the wickedness of men and who understands our humanity because he has shared it. Those who believe in him will have eternal life. (John 5: 19ff) That is life with God.

We are not take that life with him for granted. We need to listen to him through scripture, the experiences of others, times of prayer, of adoration of his presence in the Eucharist, the Holy Communion. This sacrament is the health of soul and body. It is here that we receive medicine for spiritual laziness, where faith is confirmed, hope strengthened and love inflamed and enlarged. (Thomas a Kempis Bk 4 Ch 4).

As the Lord stirs up the wills of his faithful people, we are to "bring forth the fruit of good works." We reflect on our lives as people who say we belong to Jesus, as we organize to celebrate again his first coming.

Year A Advent 1 30.11.2025 St Nicholas, Mordialloc The Reverend A R Wood