

Joshua 24. 1-3a, 14-25

1 Thessalonians 4. 13-18

Matthew 25. 1-13

You'll know the tendency of politicians, as an election approaches, to escalate the language around law and order; suggest to the public that law and order is out of control, that the government of the day is weak on it and that the government-in-waiting will fix it, if only we will elect them. Of course this logic as we have seen in Victoria in the last decades, is a race to the bottom, turning our prison system into a growth industry. Incapable as politicians are about addressing the root causes that lead or propel people into crime.

I can recall when we were living in the southern suburbs and an election had been called, the party which aspired to government had paid for a huge billboard on the Nepean Highway, suggesting that crime was out of control in the Bayside area. The inference was that the area was overrun with crime, which the government of the day was weak on. Elect us! I really wasn't aware of there being a local crime wave. But I did wonder about those BMW driving white-collar criminals wearing pin-striped suits in the week and shorts and boating shoes at the weekend. What about them, I wondered. Would this aspiring government deal with corporate corruption and wage theft.

It's the law-and-order mentality. Or in the scriptures the rewards and punishments mentality. If you're good, you will be rewarded; if you're bad, you will be punished. Many of us were socialised by both parents and authority figures that this is the way things are. They saw to it that some kind of punishment was meted out when we crossed a boundary. The trouble is, the long-term effects of this are deeply harmful. We struggle to shrug off the tendency to look over our shoulder; who's watching? Hopefully we are able to mature, grow out of this rewards and punishments world view – it is a world where the possibility of grace and forgiveness, redemption and healing cannot find a place. The only solution is a bigger prison system.

Through the Hebrew scriptures there is what you might call a theological stream or school which imagines a kind of moral cosmos where God is the divine judge, who will bestow rewards and mete out punishments in the final wash up of the universe. The roots of this theology lie in the book of Deuteronomy and then inform the way in which other books in the Hebrew scriptures are framed. Psalm 1 finishes with the words:

*Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgement,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;  
for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.*

And we have heard Joshua addressing the tribes of Israel now that they have conquered the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites:

*God is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good.'*

I don't know about you, but I cringe when I read these passages. What do we do with them, I ask myself? I attended one of the congregations small groups on Thursday and we talked about difficult passages like these and how we read them; especially in the light of Jesus and what we understand the Gospel to be about. Yet, still here as Matthew's gospel as it draws towards the passion, we hear Jesus tell a parable which threatens a slamming of the door, an act which excludes, when we understand the gospel to be about inclusion.

It is the natural human tendency that we want some kind of reckoning when someone commits an injustice against us, or others. Victims of crime, demanding that they get justice – code that I want the most serious of punishments possible; and doubled if you would. I have no doubt how I feel about the Russians at present. The long legacy which has led to the events in Israel and Gaza – the self-justifying power play of victimised and victimisers, the two groups and their backers engaging in a finger-pointing game of tit-for-tat is not going to give us any kind of resolution. And the USA, the global Mr Plod, the self-appointed global policeman, flies in again, making all the right noises but utterly incapable of being of any real help.

Through the past weeks we have read through a series of exchanges between Jesus and various opponents. These exchanges take place in the temple precinct in the days after Jesus has entered Jerusalem, leading up to his crucifixion. These episodes of political and theological push and shove, are followed by a series of predictions by Jesus about what will take place at the “end of the age”; in the final wash up.

Both Jesus and Paul lived with a world view that “end of the age” would take place fairly soon. The first letter to the church in Thessalonica is written from the perspective that this coming again of Jesus is not far away. That the whole world would draw to a close very soon and that there would be an accounting for all that had taken place. As time passes and we read Paul's later letters this expectation becomes tempered; Paul doesn't seem to be so sure.

Sue Clarkson – look busy. It's a kind of watch-your-back theology, belying a particular image of God. A watch out, or else, kind of God.

Often in our communion liturgies we say the acclamation: *Christ has died, Christ is risen; Christ will come again.*

And at the end of the creeds we make a similar affirmation: in the Apostles Creed:

*he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

And from the Nicene Creed:

*he ascended into heaven*

*and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.*

Our understanding of the universe and ourselves as humans doesn't inhabit the same spatial universe that Jesus and Paul and the ancients inhabited. God up there, hell below. The earth flat. They understood that that was the way the universe was shaped and it shaped the imaginative universe that they inhabited too. We don't understand ourselves as being in that same universe – we know the earth is not flat; we know that there is not a place called hell below us; we know that God doesn't inhabit the upper floor of the universe.

Nevertheless, we can and we do carry the same imaginative longings of a universe which longs for justice and peace of God; peace within and peace around. We know about the longings of the prophets and the words of Jesus about the presence of the reign of God in the world. We know about the lives of the apostles and early church. Two weeks ago we gave thanks for all that we inherit from the saints who have gone before us and those who have shaped our own lives. All of these speak truth to us of this divine presence in the world.

And we pray with fervent prayer in the light of the circumstances in our own lives and the difficult situations in the world: *Come, Lord Jesus*. This is a response of faithfulness on our part to the vision of God and of the whole creation for the way the world might be; and then we live toward it. It shapes how we live, the choices we make, the call to lovingkindness, the call to forgiveness, the care of creation.

In ancient Greek language and thought there were two words for time: Chronos and Kairos. We know about Chronos time; it is the word from which we get the words chronology, chronometer. It is about tic-toc time. We measure our lives by it; indeed, our lives are driven by it. We talk about things costing us time, of wasting time, and too often our workdays are valued and driven by a measurement of time.

And then there is Kairos time. Kairos time is the right moment. The moment which presents itself; and often doesn't return. Do you know those times which maybe you only recognise once they are past, because at some heart level we knew something was about to happen. But we didn't trust the intuition; and we let it slip by. And it probably hasn't returned. Kairos time, the right time, is the measure of time which characterises the reign of God. God doesn't come in our impatient ego's time, according to our expectations or sense of urgency but comes at the right time; the right time for transformation, for healing, for loosing us from the bonds which hold us.

The young women wait from the bridegroom to come. They don't know at what time he will come; but come he will they trust; they need to be ready. Five are; five are not. *The kingdom of heaven will be like this*, says Jesus.

But is this kingdom a place where the door will be slammed and the latecomers sent away somewhere else, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth? In Jesus' imagining of the kingdom, I think not. But the spiritual reality for us is that there are moments for us, Kairos moments, when the door is suddenly open for us – holy moments, numinous moments, times

when the demands and control of our egos are knocked out and we may enter into a place where a sense of the holy is real. These are what the Celts call Thin Places – thin moments where the membrane between the holy and the mundane is like a veil and we know we are in the presence of something, of some-one in whom there is the life of heaven.

This is the healing spiritual reality we all long for, that we lean toward. As Augustine said: our hearts are restless until we find our rest in you. This requires a readiness, a watchfulness for the coming kingdom. As disciples we are called to be both watchful and ready; the eyes and ears of the hearts peeled for signs of the coming kingdom. *Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.* So, may God give us grace to be able to live more deeply into the Kairos time of the reign of heaven.

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