

Reflection for the Second Sunday before Advent. Mark 13: 1-8

In the light of the current situation in the Middle East this passage seems particularly poignant. As the disciples are leaving the Temple, one of them comments on the size of the stones and the magnificence of the structure of the Temple. The Temple in Jerusalem was, at this time, one of the wonders of the world. It had taken 40 years to build and sat on the top of a hill visible for miles around. Jesus tells them that these buildings will be destroyed, "not one stone will stand on top of another!" a thought quite inconceivable for those admiring the buildings. Yet about forty years later the Romans did sack the Temple destroying most of it apart from the section we know as the 'wailing wall' where devout Jews still gather to pray. This great Temple city, it would seem, has seen little peace ever since. Claimed by Jews, Christians and Islam as a sacred space, Jerusalem has been argued and fought over ever since.

Those who live in Gaza could not have imagined that much of their landscape, their homes, places of work, would be reduced to rubble in such a short space of time. Do the inhabitants of this place begin to think that they are facing 'end times' we might wonder, it would not be hard to imagine such a possibility, but the disciples ask Jesus 'What will be the sign when will these things be accomplished?'

We are told that there will be wars and rumours of wars; we have seen and heard of many over the centuries and our media bring the horrors of wars ever closer to us. Jesus tells us that these things will take place, but the end times are yet to come, we know not when. There are those who are ready to forecast the end of everything with confidence and yet have been proved to be wrong. In this passage we are reminded of false prophets, those who purport to come from God but have not. Jesus reminds us that wars between nations will continue to be a part of the world in which we live, as will natural disasters. Mark is describing the world in which he lives, and it is still the world in which we live. We cannot second guess God's judgement. We must wait for the time when God takes ultimate control and wipes away all evil. When this will be we are not given to know. In the meantime, as followers of Jesus, we must continue to do what we can to foster the paths of peace, to feed the hungry, to heal the sick and free those trapped by the consequences of evil. We wait for the time when 'all tears shall be wiped away and death will be no more.'

*Father God,
Thank you for your exciting promise
that Jesus will come back in glory and power.
Help us not to focus our energy
on looking for signs of exactly when,
but to make sure that we will be ready,
whether that be today,
tomorrow or in a thousand years.
Amen*