

8/9/19, Isaiah 42:1-9; Luke 13:1-9, 31-35

. ..**What next? How much can anyone bear?** I think of friends & strangers, all those living with serious illness or the loss of a loved one during the Covid lockdown. Or the people of Beirut, who over past 10 years, did not turn away over 1million refugees from Syria just as they had also hosted 50 years earlier 2 million exiled Palestinians. Lebanon, a small state stuck in the cockpit of Middle East conflict, fought over by more powerful neighbours & as a result suffering invasions & civil war & most recently, sanctions by President Trump; and on Tuesday a huge explosion of at least a quarter of the destructive power dropped on Hiroshima 75 years ago.

Why? Why does God allow such terrible things to happen?

.. The message of God through the OT prophets & in Jesus, is that the heart of God is not to put the boot in but to lift up & not crush, to comfort, heal & restore the wounded & give a fresh start to the broken in body & in spirit; to deliver the oppressed & lift up the humble.

Same question was put to Jesus. **Why?** Although those asking Jesus that then assumed that punishment from God for the sins of the victims or their families was the reason— a connection Jesus consistently denied. Pilgrims from Galilee executed on orders from the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate as they went to offer their worship in the Temple. & in the other incident, part of the SE walls of Jerusalem, near the pools of Siloam, when it had collapsed with loss of life. They were not more guilty than anyone else. vv. 3 & 5: **But (again) unless you repent – stop & turn away from what you know is wrong, you too will perish.**

Today, faced with troubles of this world, esp. the Covid pandemic & all the disruption, loss, fear & anxieties, it has brought, **do we** look around for others people to blame **or pray/ ask** what is the God saying to us & how does the Lord want us to respond

. **What do you or I need to repent of & where do you & I need to change?** & what about God's people today who claim to be followers & learners of X in the Church that bears His Name? Do we pray that the Lord will show us & help us change? Do we look to His directions in the Bible & then look away, & live as if we know best & please ourselves?.

Back then, Jesus may well have been mainly referring to coming destruction of Jerusalem & the Temple in AD 70 if they insisted on preferring a barren nationalist religion of ritual & rules & hostility to outsiders to relationship with living God through Christ, but Jesus' warnings are for us also today. **God is looking for willing hearts ...God has no favourites. You do not have to be special but you do have to be available** - repeat.

& that theme of impending judgement, Jesus returned to in vv. 31-35, as He made His way to Jerusalem. When some sympathetic Pharisees warned Him to go somewhere else because Herod wants to kill Him, Jesus was resolute. It was God directing His life not Herod or the Pharisees & His mission would unfold according to God's timing & plan. ***I do have to go to the city of Jerusalem even though I know that Herod & my enemies will kill me there. For I shall rise to life after 3 days after death & hell have done their worst but failed to have the final say. & people of Jerusalem do you recognise my love, God's love for you? How often I have longed to gather you as hen gathers her chicks under her wings but you were not willing!***

& later, Luke tells us, (19:41) ***Jesus wept over city of Jerusalem*** Jesus was heartbroken over way Jews of Jerusalem & so many since would reject Him but He continues to offer His vulnerable love. ***But you were not willing*** .

. **We can choose how we will respond** to Jesus' loving invitation to us, even, especially, in times of trouble. Choose a willing and available heart today. Parable of fig-tree in vv. 6-9 cf of vine & vineyard is repeated through Bible from Isaiah to Jesus. Farmer allows the fig tree (Israel) space & more time to bear fruit.

In what ways is God giving you & me time - but limited time - to get our act together & be changed & blessed by X? Apostle Peter knew God's grace not judgement & could later write, "*Though it may seem slow to us, the Lord does keep His promises. He is patient with you not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to turn to Him.*" 2 Peter 3:9

Ponder and listen to Great is thy faithfulness, hymn by Thomas Chisholm who suffered chronic illness throughout his life, based on words of hope of Jeremiah (Lamentations 3:21-32): after 65 verses of lament, pain, bewilderment and loss, as he sat in the rubble of Jerusalem after ransacked by the Babylonian army and the exile of many.

Anyway

People are often unreasonable,
illogical and self-centred.
Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind,
people may accuse
you of selfish motives;
be kind anyway.

If you are successful,
you will win some false friends
and some true enemies;
succeed anyway.

If you are honest and frank,
people may cheat you;
be honest and frank anyway.

What you spend years building,
someone could destroy overnight;
build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness,
they may be jealous;
be happy anyway.

The good you do today,
people will often forget tomorrow;
do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have,
and it may never be enough;
give the world the best you have anyway.

You see, in the final analysis,
it is between you and God;

It was never between you and them anyway.

Mother Theresa