

Thought for the Day 11 July 2020 from Alan Griggs

Luke 19: 11-27

In 598 BC Jerusalem was captured and the people of Israel went into exile in Babylon. Ezekiel, who was a prophet at that time, witnessed the way in which, in stages, the Glory of God moved away from the city. The people who went into exile lamented what had happened.

By the rivers of Babylon we sat down. There we wept when we remembered Zion (Psalm 137) .

They did not know when they would return; or know if life would return to normal when they did. After 70 years they did return and the Temple was rebuilt, but not all were sure whether their God had returned to his throne in the New Temple. There were some, like Zechariah, Simeon and Anna, who looked forward to a future King/Messiah who would herald a time of peace and prosperity.

Does all this sound familiar? An unexpected catastrophe, a period when the normal disappears, and people do not know when it is going to end. When it does, will everything be the same as it was? What will the new normal be like? Some hope it won't be quite the same. During the lock-down there has been growing signs of a stronger sense of community; people are helping others, doing their shopping, contacting those who are living on their own. A recent survey has found that 81% think people are doing more to help others since the Covid-19 pandemic began.

The parable that Jesus told them, in today's passage from St. Luke, describes a ruler who went away to be made a King, and was returning to his people. keen to find out how they had been conducting themselves in his absence.

(In fact when Herod the Great died in 4 BC his territory was divided and Archelaus became the ruler of Judea. He did go to Rome hoping to be appointed a king, but he was followed by a delegation of Jews who disliked him and didn't want him as king. On that occasion they failed, but 10 years later they again appealed to the Emperor and this time they were successful).

But though Jesus' hearers in the first century AD would know this story, they would also know that any story about a king and his subjects would naturally be understood as about God and His people.

When God came back how would he find them? Would they be truthful and righteous? Would they be practising justice and righteousness? Would they be concerned for the poor and the sick and the marginalised? If they were not behaving as they should, God would be coming, not to bring peace and prosperity, but to bring judgement.

This was the message that Jesus had been proclaiming as he toured the towns and villages of Galilee and which was coming to a head as Jesus approached the city of Jerusalem. What the Jews of His day failed to understand was that it was not a matter of how they would be judged at the end of time, but how they were being judged at this very moment. God was indeed coming to His people, looking for justice. Jesus had warned them how judgement would fall if they failed to heed his words. God is indeed coming; they are rejecting Him as Jesus comes into the city.

But judgement is not just historical; we are being judged now and there is danger if we ignore the warnings that we have been given.