

St Thomas Exeter 16.3.25

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

Luke 13: 34

Watched anything good on TV recently? I must admit I binged on ‘Unforgotten’. Sometimes I watch “Inside No 9” with my son – it’s a series of half hour dramas, normally funny but also dark. The only connection is that the stories happen in “no. 9” (house, room, sleeping car on a train etc).

But some of you may be more into soaps – Eastenders, Coronation Street – or the Archers on the radio. In these, though, there are little storylines. But there are also continued storylines. There are birthdays and adventures and deaths; but there are some overarching themes; “what happens now” links with what happened last week... last month... last year... or many years ago.

We sometimes read Gospel stories like they are an episode of “Inside No 9”. But in fact we are dipping into a much bigger story. The story of a God who longs over his people; the story of a Jesus who compares himself not to the dealmaker or conquering hero, but to a hen who longs to gather her chicks under her wings to protect them from fire or fox... and yet they won’t have it.

“How I would have gathered you and you were not willing”

Talking of foxes, our story today starts with a warning; strangely, a warning from some pharisees (who we normally cast as the baddies) that Herod is out to get Jesus. Herod of course is a thug who is only in power because his dad was the biggest thug in town. He held plenty of cards because the Romans found it convenient to let him do so. He is gunning for Jesus, but Jesus has an agenda... today he’s dealing with demons and cures, but soon he is on his way to Jerusalem because that’s where prophets get killed.

As we travel through Lent and Holy Week we are invited to see that this Jesus story turns our thinking upside down. Earlier in this chapter, as Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem, he has encouraged his followers to enter thru a narrow door – not a wide door – to be part of a kingdom that starts like a small seed but becomes something very big... to be like the little teaspoon of yeast mixed in to the flour that makes all the difference.

Do you get angry at injustice? I must admit I do. Sometimes it’s about little things like someone parking where they shouldn’t.

But also at the bigger stuff.

When cash *trumps* compassion, stuff *trumps* community, ego *trumps* humility, hands of cards *trump* kindness and chainsaws *trump* common sense ... then I despair.

When the richest man in the world decides the fate of starving children ... when violence seems to pay dividends ... and when the modern-day Fox (News) gets to decide what’s right or wrong ... then who am I?

Incrementally we seem to be nearer 1938 by the day. History repeats itself because no-one listened last time.

And nearer to home, when money for wheelchairs may be saved to pay for missiles ... how far have we come? The easiest thing sometimes is just to turn off the news because it’s all too much.

Of course we need to be careful not to typecast ... it was Pharisees who warned Jesus about Herod ... but we also know that evil prospers when good people say nothing.

Sometimes it's good to live in the bigger story. The story of the Lord who like a hen would gather the chicks under the safety of her wings.

Sometimes it's good, like Paul, to recognise that our citizenship isn't English, British or European; our citizenship is in heaven.

I really don't think a bit of despair does us any harm. Of course there is hope at the human level; like the man who built barns, the art of the deal won't protect anyone from the ravages of the ever rolling stream of time. And it's probably only a matter of time before the heirs apparent start fighting each other. Like the temple in Jerusalem... eventually the whole house of cards will come tumbling down

But in the meantime – maybe we could dare to be a bit more prophetic? Not in an "I'm better than you" way, but in going the Jesus way... even when that a hard way.

But there *is* also something prophetic about what we do this morning. Soon Father David will take bread and wine – simple things. The bread will be broken – the wine will be poured out...

We will be invited to receive this food for the journey through this troubulous life ... but's it is also a foretaste ... an advance instalment of the banquet when Jesus returns...

This Eucharist is a deeply subversive and rebellious act.

11 years ago I was in Cape Town and I attended a Eucharist celebrated by one of my heroes Archbishop Desmond Tutu. At the peace he asked all visitors to stand and to say where they were from. One man said that he managed a pension fund of several trillion Rand. Desmond responded. "I see; I see they have a problem with the roof here"

The South African liturgy includes these words just at the point of invitation. The President says, "Behold who we are" and the people respond "May we become what we receive".

The invitation of Jesus is to receive food for a journey where you are powerless, yet called to make a difference; but maybe also the sustenance to live lives that point to a different kind of power. Yes, and to receive the invitation to journey with him to Jerusalem, Gethsemane and Golgotha.

How often I have desired to gather you as a hen gathers her brood under her wingsand YOU?