

The First Sunday of Advent
Year C
Daily Readings for Sunday
December 1, 2024

Homily for St Peters by the Lake.

Four weeks ago, Fr Dennis began his homily by talking about the need to purchase Melways or use a travel app in order to get directions on where we need to go. I am old enough to remember Melways, but now I have a lovely computerised Irish woman, whom I have named Kathleen, telling me where to go!

As Dennis spoke, I was reminded of a time I was in Ireland and asked an elderly Irish woman for directions on how to find a local holy well. We're talking here about the archetypal ancient Irish woman, standing on the side of the road, dressed in a skirt and blouse with a shawl around her shoulders. Maybe I should have approached someone who looked more reliable for directions - I may have had more luck. Truly, it was as if she had read the book on Irish jokes, because I kid you not, she said in all helpfulness and an obvious desire to assist, 'Well to be sure, I wouldn't be starting from here!'

The thing is though, we do have to start from here. I'll come back to this.

Rather than starting from here, our first reading today, from the book of Jeremiah, asks us to be future-thinkers. 'The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.'

We are asked to imagine a time that heralds in the kingdom of God. A time when, say three hundred years from now, Earth is regenerating her beauty, when there will be food shared equally amongst all, when technology frees us from illness, when access to education is taken for granted, when transportation is free of emissions, when all forms of life are honoured and enhanced. This is a pretty big vision! Is this the kingdom of God? Yes, and yet I see the kingdom of God as this and more. I see the kingdom of God as a world where, as the hymn we have just sung invites us, we sow love where there is hatred, we bring joy where there is sadness and hope where there is despair. This is the vision that I believe Jeremiah is referring to when he says 'I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah'.

And we have the same vision in Luke's beautiful poem proclaimed by Mary that we call the Magnificat. 'You have cast the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.' 'You have filled the hungry with good things and the rich you have sent away empty.' Look around or turn on the news and we might wonder how anyone can proclaim that the mighty have been cast from their thrones and the hungry have enough to eat. And yet the kingdom of God proclaims just this. The kingdom of God is at hand. This is the stance of hope.

It is the central biblical view that revelation occurs as the divine promise which calls human hope to life. As Jurgen Moltmann says in his profound book, *The Theology of Hope*, 'hope strengthens faith and aids a believer into living a life of love, and directing them toward a new creation of all things. It creates in a believer a "passion for the possible" in which hope, through visions, dreams and projects, kindles the imagination to transcend the limits of reality into the sphere of the possible.' When Jeremiah proclaims that 'the days are surely coming when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah', he is talking about seeing the passion for the possible, for God, to be revealed in all things.

Do you know what I think are two of the most important words in our English language? The words 'And yet...' Things look really bad, *and yet...* And yet, despite all the evidence to the contrary, and yet, although it seems impossible, there are alternatives, there are ways forward, there is hope.

This stance of 'And yet...' is what Mary proclaimed in the Magnificat. Despite the exploitative rich, despite the presence of the hungry, despite all the evidence to the contrary, 'and yet' God is present in this place, leading us into a new future.

It is the same passion I feel each time I hear Martin Luther King Jr speak those immortal words 'I have a dream...'

Which brings me to Rob Bell. UNPACK.

God is not 'above' us, but with us, for us and ahead of us. What if God truly was with us, for us and, in the focus of Advent, ahead of us? Let's pause here and take this on board. God is ahead of us – before we get there, God is already there. Based on the unfolding of thousands of years of biblical wisdom and the lived experience of millions of people through the past two thousand years, I can assure you that God truly is

ahead of us in this time of unrest. That every moment has the potential to be transformed by grace.

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Which really is the core of the Christian message – that the gospel, the good news, does more than fulfil the Old Testament history of promise; it takes it up into a new future. What is required is an attitude of creative expectation which sets about transforming the present situation, because it is open towards the universal future of God's kingdom.

So, the scene is set. The Hebrew scriptures prophecy that there will come a time when the Kingdom of God is fulfilled. The Magnificat proclaims that that time arises with the birth of Jesus. And two thousand years of faith-filled people praying and living lives of peace and justice give witness to the power of living a life of love in that Kingdom.

So, whilst my Irish woman from whom I asked directions said, 'well to be sure, I wouldn't be starting from here', we do start from here. We look to our past, our ancestors, our heritage – both familial and biblical – and find wisdom from these sources, and we live in the present and it is here, in this present, that we live within the kingdom of God. Each moment we start from here...

Again, hold that thought...

Michael Fox / Rupert Sheldrake (scientist). UNPACK

Is the soul in you or are you in the Soul? If we are in the Soul, we can just get on with being Christ-bearers without wondering if we have enough hope, enough courage, enough love.

Which raises for me a very important question: What then does the Divine One, the Holy One, want to be made known through me? Through you? Through each one of us? How am I, how are you, being called to be a hope-bearer? A Christ-bearer?

'Make me an instrument of your peace, Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.'

That's what I think being a hope-bearer is about. In that every moment has the potential to be transformed by grace, we bear witness to the infinite love in which we reside by being instruments of God's love. It is about being engaged in the work of bringing healing and hope. I think that this is what it means to live in the Soul.

St Paul knew this in today's reading from Thessalonians. He writes, 'and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you.' May we increase and abound in love for each person sitting here today, for those we love and care about, for orphans, widows, refugees, prisoners, the homeless, the hungry, the victims of war, the lost at heart, the lonely, the polluted rivers, the species nearing extinction, the oceans full of plastic bottles, the melting ice caps. If we love, how can we not act? For the core message of today is that as hope-bearers, as Christ-bearers, we are captured by that 'passion for the possible' in which hope, through visions, dreams and projects, kindles the imagination to transcend the limits of reality into the sphere of the possible.'

I *am* going to start from here, for I truly believe that I live in the Soul and as such all things are possible. We bring the past to now, and we take our hope into the future, but we have to start somewhere and that somewhere is here. I may not have a Melways, but I do have this community of faith to which I belong and I thank you that you are committed to me, as I am to you, to journeying together as hope-bearers, as Christ-bearers into the future. I have an inkling that *this* is what the kingdom of God is all about.