

Advent 1. 29 November 2020. One day.

What day are you longing for?

“Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Wednesday, Friday, Sunday, Saturday” (to quote The Godfather)? Is there a day in the week you long to get to? TGIF, ‘Thank God It’s Friday’, works for those who have a five day weekday working week, but not for everybody. I have Tuesday as a day off, so Monday afternoon looks good to me.

But it may not be a particular day of the week. Many people who have retired tell me that the days of the week start to blur a little.

It may be a day when something in particular is achieved. Many year 12 students have been longing and waiting for particular days all year: The day of the final exams. The day of the ‘Formal’. Graduation Day. The day the final results come out. The day University offers are released. Those are all important days yet, like most days which are significant, they are both endings and beginnings at the same time.

The day of being appointed for a first job or a new job is an ending from one pattern in life and the beginning of a new pattern. Even the day of retirement from employment, from any position of authority or from any worthwhile and meaningful and significant connection in our lives is the ending of one pattern in life and the beginning of a new pattern.

Longing for certain days is an expression of hope, not just that something will end but that something new will begin. For some people the day they long for with hope is a day when pain will end, when some trauma, physical or mental, will finally come to an end. It is a longing for release but that longing always has embedded in it the longing, the hope, for what comes after.

In Mark 13:24 we heard words from Jesus about ‘those days’. They sound like terrible days, days of convulsing, tumultuous, disturbing crisis. They sound like days that no one would really long for, days that some may hope would never come. In the patterns of life of the people of God in those centuries the days to which Jesus refers were sometimes summarised as ‘the day of the Lord’.

That phrase ‘the day of the Lord’ appears 86 times in the Old and New Testaments. It was an expectation and a hope which came out of dissatisfaction. People looked around their world and they could see that things were not as they believed they should be. They looked at the way that people interacted, the way that different parts of humanity treated one another and they could see that this was not the way that God calls us to live. They could see corruption, terrible violence, persecution, selfishness erupting in patterns of life which were not only self-destructive but rippling with destruction for communities. People looked around them and said ‘this all sucks’.

So they longed for, hoped for, a change. They longed for an end to the way that the world had become. And they longed for God to come and make that change. The ‘day of the Lord’ was always longed for as a day of sweeping changes when God would deal with the terrible people, overturn the corruption and eventually, through the turmoil, bring about peace. The ending of one painful and terrible pattern was always bound together with the longing for a better pattern, the inauguration of a time of peace. For some people in our world they are looking at 20 January 2021 through just that window!

The hope and the longing may be expressed as if that 'day of the Lord' is a once off event. Once the day comes then everything changes for ever. Is that true? Yes and no. For Christians the 'day of the Lord' has already happened. It was not just one day. If we had to pin it down to two days then it would be the day Jesus was born and the day of his resurrection. Both those days brought about significant change in our world, to the connection between God and humanity and among us all. The 'day' could also be said to be the entirety of Jesus' life on earth. He came to bring peace, to restore right relationships among people and between us and God, to overturn everything negative and destructive. He fulfilled all the hopes.

Yet the world is still a place where there is so much that happens which we look at and say 'this sucks', these things are not as we can be, as we should be. This is not the best of humanity. This is not who we are called to be. We look at the destruction of the earth in the name of progress or profit. We look at the persecution of minorities and groups in society in the name of ideology and concepts of 'purity'. We look at the way that the vulnerable are treated so badly and we recognise that this is not how God calls us to live.

Out of that dissatisfaction some people around our world call for a new 'day of the Lord', or they shape their hope with the thought that the day has not yet arrived but is coming soon. For us as Christians the 'day of the Lord' has already begun, in the life and presence and message and love of Jesus. The challenge is actually to live IN that day. The invitation is to live immersed in the change that has already been brought.

The hope that we carry now is that what has already been revealed will actually be seen in hearts and in the lives of humanity.

On 28 August 1963 Martin Luther King delivered his powerful speech including the ringing words "I have a dream". King dreamed of a time when ALL people would be treated with respect and dignity, when hatred and violence would be set aside, when people would allow their hearts to be opened and cleansed of prejudice and division. King dreamed of freedom. That was a powerful expression of hope, a hope which continues because it is still not yet seen in so many places. The need for what has become known as the 'Black Lives Matter' movement reveals that so many people in our world still have not accepted that dream which King shared, nor have they heard and accepted the message which Jesus shared. That hope is not dead but it continues. The 'day of the Lord' has come. More of the people of our world just need to live in it.

The end of my words in this sermon is not the end of the message because I want you to share a video called 'One Day'. It is an expression of hope from an artist and composer, Matisyahu, who led a gathering of 3000 Jews and Muslims in Israel as they sang together, longing for a day when there would be an end to violence and hatred and prejudice and persecution.

As you listen, please ask yourself, "am I living in 'the day of the Lord'?" Am I living in such a way that I do all that I can to set aside prejudice, to foster peace, to overcome divisions, to promote harmony, to enable integrity, to discover hope again and again and again in the presence of love and the light of Christ in our world? Long and hope for the new beginning, for the peace to come. Live this day.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gqw0WirTRQ>

Amen.

Paul Mitchell.