

Tonight is Bonfire Night. I'm sure some of us look forward to the spectacle, the noise, the bright colours lighting the dark autumn sky, while for others, particularly those who are alone or vulnerable it can be quite worrying and scary.

As we watch the news each night, the situation in the Middle East graphically reminds of the human suffering which war and oppression brings to our fellow human beings. For those in Israel and Gaza, the night skies lit up by bright lights bring fear, suffering and death on a large scale.

There is a lot going on in our world today, earthquakes, famines, wars, and rumours of wars. Jesus told his disciples to expect the same kinds of events in today's Gospel reading. Last week Phil preached on a passage later on in Matthew Chapter 24. He explained that Matthew was writing his Gospel in around 70AD. The time when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, as Jesus had prophesied a few decades earlier. This must have been a frightening time for the people of Israel, both Jews and Christians.

Jesus warns his disciples to expect persecution and suffering, just for being his followers. He warns them not to be taken in by false prophets but to stay true and faithful to his teachings. Something which equally applies to us today in a challenging world, with so many temptations facing us. Others may do signs and wonders that may indicate their authenticity. But we know that when Jesus returns it will be like no other event we have ever seen or experienced.

In today's Gospel we are encouraged not to be alarmed. The end is not yet coming yet and we will not miss it. As we heard last week, no one but the Father knows the time when He will come, but we should all act as if He were coming now.

Despite the challenges and temptations of this world, we are called to endure; to stir up our love for Jesus; to continue to proclaim the good news of the gospel to the ends of the earth. At the heart of these verses, is a call to trust only in God! For he alone is the only one we can trust and depend upon in all things. And his love endures forever!

We are reminded of God's eternal and unending love in the words of Psalm 107 which we heard earlier. The psalm reflects on Israel's restoration from exile in Babylon. The people disobeyed God and ignored his covenant, they were taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar. Then after several years in exile, many of them were allowed to return.

The psalm paints a number of word pictures describing the redemption of the people from exile. But the psalm also concerns Jesus, prophesying his coming as the Messiah, foretelling what he would say and do in his earthly ministry. We heard one in the reading:

*“he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things”*

Later in the psalm we are told that:

*“he brought them out of darkness and gloom, and broke their bonds asunder”*

*“he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction”*

*“he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed”*

*“he raises up the needy out of distress, and makes their families like flocks”.*

I'd recommend you take a few minutes in the week to read the whole of Psalm 107 and reflect on the pictures it creates, the way in which it prophesies Jesus coming as the Messiah, his ministry, his example to all of us, the comfort which it gives us about God's unlimited and everlasting love for us all.

Coming back to Bonfire Night, I was reminded of a sermon I once heard where the congregation were asked “what type of firework you would be?”

Are we like a Katherine Wheel, whizzing around making a lot of noise but not getting anywhere? Are we a Banger that just makes noise but doesn't produce anything spectacular? Or perhaps we are a Roman Candle that shoots majestically into the air, producing an array of colour and beauty. Other ideas include Sparklers, easy to use and relatively friendly, but have to be managed with care, and Rockets, leaving a trail behind you wherever you go.

Something to ponder on tonight if you go to a bonfire or fireworks display, or like me what out of the window as all the neighbours let off their fireworks! What type of firework would I be? How does our light shine in the world and to those around us?

Whatever type of firework you are, remember that God can use you. Remember the words of the Psalm, *“he brought them out of darkness and gloom”*. Jesus is the light of the world. As John says (8:12), “Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness.”

There are wars and rumours of wars, famine and earthquakes and much more going on in our world today. As followers of Jesus, we must do all that we can through our actions, words and prayers to try to bring about peace and reconciliation, to bring light to those around us and in our world, no matter how difficult that might seem.