A Sermon for the Third Sunday in Kingdom Season
16 November 2025

When I looked at the readings for this service, I really wondered what I might be able to do with them in order to offer some hope to us all. After all, that's an important part of the sermon. It should explore scripture, it should reflect the wisdom of God as contained in the readings, and it should offer some hope to the congregation, as well as possibly challenge them in a gentle way.

Today, I really have my work set out for me … apart from the idyllic imagery of the prophet Isaiah where the wolf and the lamb live peacefully together, and the lion eats straw rather than hunts. But we do not live in such a paradise. We live a complex and problem-filled world, and we need to make the best of it. So, how might we do this? And how might scripture help us?

Before I speak about the Gospel passage, I think it's worth talking a little about the passage from the second letter to the Thessalonians.

If we were to take this passage literally and act according to its instructions; we run a huge risk. The risk is that we would ostracise others based on an external judgement made about their behaviour and their conduct. This does no-one any good. We risk being exclusive and even discriminatory, and certainly would appear to be intolerant. This is not what we are called to be. Jesus himself would rightly rebuke us for such behaviour, especially if we dared to do so in his name or in the name of God.

What I can suppose, in terms of the original text, is that it was written to guide the community of Thessalonica in response to a very specific situation and context; background details that we no longer have. I hope that Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, who greet the Church at the start of the letter, were offering the wisdom and advice needed at that time, in order to help that early Church community to flourish and to grow.

Yet, there is something we can learn from this, and it is a worthwhile and enduring lesson. We need to be responsible for our behaviour, and be willing to examine our conduct from time to time when necessary, and we do need to make sure that we surround ourselves with people who inspire us and lift us up. We also need to make sure that we are people who inspire and lift up those who encounter us – it goes both ways. As always, you get what you give.

Let us take the passage's conclusion to heart, "do not be weary in doing what is right", always remembering that what is right is the path inspired and guided by love and empathy.

So let us be wise. Let us be willing to gently counsel others when they ask for our counsel or when we offer a point of view, but never go so far as to be punitive and judgemental towards others. Let us be merciful, and compassionate, and ensure that we wish for the best for one another, and each other's growth and flourishing in faith.

Now I shall turn to the Gospel passage, and it's an emotional rollercoaster … Jesus is in full prophetic mode, and his words are somewhat hard to hear. He's speaking of the future, and it does not look bright. In fact, it's dark and it is frightening.

He speaks of people being led astray, of warfare and violence, of natural disasters and calamities. He warns of "dreadful portents and great signs from heaven." As we hear this, you might be longing for a comforting glimpse of the Jesus who healed, who offered reassurance, and the compassion of previous teachings.

And then Jesus almost doubles-down on the nihilistic prophecies. He speaks of the persecution of the faithful, of their betrayal, even by those who should love them unconditionally and protect them. He even warns that they will be hated, and that some of them will die.

So where on earth might some hope be found? Is there comfort to be drawn from this?

The hope we might draw from this comes from the fact that throughout human history, there have always been difficulties and times of devastation, but humanity continues and endures. In time of crisis and calamity, people are able to work together and care for each other. This resilience is where hope may be found.

As we reflect on these dire prophecies, and the fact that there are still wars and insurrections, and that humankind has not found peace, we can thank God for the gift of resilience. We can be grateful and for the understanding that life is not perfect, the times and seasons are never perfect nor are they predictable, but that we can continue to hope in the goodness of God, the love of God, and the wisdom of God.

Let our resilience be the "wisdom that none of our opponents will be able to withstand or contradict". And let us be grateful that we are the recipients of divine love that we have not earned, nor could never earn, but have been given through God's grace, and enduring hospitality towards us. Through the Eucharist, let us be brought to an awareness of that love and hospitality, and may it fuel us in our journey, this day and always.

Rev. Dr Emily Fraser
All Saints, South Hobart and St Raphael's, Fern Tree
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