

“When the Christ comes, will faith be found on earth?”

Now there’s a cryptic comment!

(My paraphrase for the record!)

I came as a permanent resident to New Zealand in 1970. Unbelievably that is 40 years ago.

On December the first this year I will have been an ordained priest of the Anglican Church for 31 years. Believe you me that seems equally unbelievable. I do quite literally hang into the established church by the skin of my teeth!

40 years ago you could not buy new cars in New Zealand without an import licence, and they were as scarce as hen’s teeth. We bought a little blue Hillman Imp out on the boat with us.

You could not borrow money from the bank to buy a house. There was a waiting list that sometimes took years to find fulfilment – one had to borrow money from lawyers and other private lending institutions at much higher cost.

If you saw Black African face your head would turn in wonderment and although there was an Asian segment to the population they were in the absolute minority.

These things seem ludicrous now.

In the church altars were pushed up hard against the East wall and one never saw a pair of high heels under a cassock – well you might have done but they weren’t on a woman!

Some new fangled experimental liturgies were being foisted upon us – I must admit I always enjoyed Evensong from the Book of Common Prayer which was my preferred Sunday service. We used to take my new born son in his carry cot...

How things have changed in such a short space of time.

There has been a revolution in New Zealand society – in the way we live and in the demographics of our population.

And here has been a revolution in the church with the ordination of women and our ability to use more flexible liturgies with words that are inclusive of both women and men and which recognise the multicultural nature of our community.

Many of the gains we have made have not been without their cost. The battle for the ordination of women saw the most bizarre denigration and humiliation of women who sought equality and justice; there were abuses that occurred over the introduction of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill; the fight for justice in Southern Africa with the Springbok tour saw violence from the establishment that was unprecedented in New Zealand history; and the introduction of Civil Union legislation and the battle for equity in the work force amongst women and men have equally seen individuals verbally and even physically assaulted.

The list goes on...

One would like to think that we now live in a more enlightened, inclusive, accepting and just world...

...but often it does not take much to realise that old habits die hard and that lurking underneath a thin veil there is an ugliness that often subtly emerges and sometimes overtly raises its evil head.

Look at the debacle over Paul Henry and his horribly racist remarks about the Governor General and the incredibly inept response from a TVNZ spokes person who suggested that he often verbalised things that people were quietly thinking to themselves!

Or at the growing demeaning and sexualisation of women in advertising and TV reality programmes; the widening rift between the rich and the poor; and even in my own home I was just last week abused by a guest into my house who suddenly realised I was not heterosexual!

And in our church community there is the movement for a 'Covenant' amongst worldwide Anglicans which will effectively stifle any creative pushing of the edges in many areas.

It sometimes seems that 40 years of struggle and fighting for a more just and equitable society and church has come to nought.

Our Gospel reading this morning then is a salient reminder that we must NEVER give up...

“Before telling the parable of the widow and the judge, the gospel reports that Jesus had been responding to questions from the Pharisees concerning the timing of the coming of God’s reign. The parable, though, is not a story about signs and forecasts; rather it speaks to the final hope of those who are held in low regard by society.

In Jesus’ day, the responsibility of a judge was to settle disagreements among the Jews. Disputes involving widows and orphans were not uncommon, as the law did not allow a widow to inherit her husband’s estate, which passed on to the deceased man’s sons or brothers.

If these relatives did not act with justice and honour in providing for the widow of their father or brother, a judge was the widow’s last recourse for securing the resources necessary to support life.

For those of Jesus’ hearers who were without status in society, a story about a widow with no power and a judge with no compassion might not have seemed shocking.

This judge, however, “neither feared God nor had respect for the people”

This judge did not simply lack compassion; he was unjust.

Still, in this story the widow’s persistence wins the day. The widow refuses to accept her fate, and the judge is astounded. God’s justice triumphs!

This parable then is about not losing heart –

It’s about asking boldly and living justly when working against injustice.

It is a reminder that whatever happens, God’s ways will prevail.

Living with such hope and certainty that God’s justice will carry the day is no easy thing.” *Taken from Seasons of the Spirit*

There has been a generation of people who have literally laid their lives on the line – as there have been generations of people before them – to seek justice, equity and the fullness of life for all.

Jesus calls us again today to continue this struggle – to be vigilant; to be persistent; to persevere, otherwise indeed “When the Christ comes, will faith be found on earth?”

We must never lose heart while waiting and working for the coming of God’s reign.

I came across this lovely poem Antonio Machado. It reads:

The wind, one brilliant day, called
to my soul with an odour of jasmine.

The wind says:

"In return for the odour of my jasmine,
I'd like all the odour of your roses."

My soul replies:

"I have no roses; all the flowers
in my garden are dead."

The wind says:

"Well then, I'll take the withered petals
and the yellow leaves and the waters of the fountain."

the wind left. And I wept. And I said to myself:

"What have you done with the garden that was entrusted to you?"

A wonderful poem that begs the question: What fragrance does your faith spread into the world?

...and Indeed again – When Christ comes will faith be found on earth...?

