

El Nino  
Luke 21:25-36

We're strange creatures, we human beings . . . especially the religious variety! Our own holy texts speak of signs in the skies and on the earth . . . they remind us to keep watch . . . to be on our guard . . . for the end of the world is coming . . . God's Word tells us these things . . . and yet, how quickly we discount that word . . . that doesn't apply to us . . . that's only for crazy street preachers, or doomsday prophets . . . after all, these signs have been happening forever . . . and predictions of the end of the world are as old as the hills . . . so, really, we can ignore this text . . . we can get on with doing whatever we were doing. Familiarity breeds contempt, as they say . . . and complacency.

Well, I reckon us church people could learn a thing or two from the secular world . . . and it wouldn't be the first time!

There's some irony in the fact that the more Christians discount and ignore the signs of the end times, the more the secular world is concerned about them . . . the sun . . . the surging of the waves . . . the changing climate . . . is it all pointing to the end of the world? The secular world seems much more interested in reading the signs and responding to the signs than the church does.

Over the last few years we've become used to hearing the terms El Nino and La Nina, terms that relate to broad weather patterns that strongly influence the world's climate. Of most interest, and concern, here in Australia is El Nino because that means warmer temperatures, reduced rainfall, hotter summers and increased fire danger. The Bureau of Meteorology actually does regular modeling to predict where the cycle is at and what sort of weather we can expect in the coming year. That's not just an academic exercise for egg-head scientists . . . by knowing what's coming we can find ways of keeping people safe and caring for people in what is already a harsh climate. So, the weather bureau is very interested in the signs in the skies.

And, perhaps, we Christians should be as well . . . for the same reasons. Jesus said, "When you see the leaves sprouting on the trees you know that summer is near . . . this is also a sign . . . a reminder that the kingdom of God is near." The kingdom of God is near . . . as near as our flesh and blood. The kingdom of God is nothing less than God's gracious and loving presence in the person of Jesus . . . Jesus who has come to keep people safe from eternal separation . . . Jesus who has come to save us from our sin . . . Jesus who has come to care for the poor and the lame and the sick and the lonely and the hopeless.

When you see the signs that's what they mean . . . Jesus is near . . . the same Jesus who shared himself with us in baptism . . . the same Jesus who gives himself freely to us in and under bread and wine . . . the same Jesus who says to us, "Follow me!" and sends us out into the world to be who he calls us to be . . . that is people who care . . . people who care for others . . . people who care for our world . . . that goes for the big issues like climate change to the very personal needs of our neighbour . . . we are people who care enough to heed the signs . . . for the signs of the times remind us who we are.

Who we are . . . aren't we the body of Christ? The body of Jesus. Jesus who is himself the embodiment of God's kingdom here on earth!

So, when we hear a Bible text like this . . . this is not the time to yawn and switch off . . . like we've heard it all before. Yes, we've heard it all before . . . that's Jesus' point . . . we know what's coming . . . we've had a taste of God's amazing grace and goodness in our lives . . . we've been set free from sin death and the devil, as Luther would say . . . so this is not a time for self-absorption . . . of been weighed down with drunkenness and the worries of this life . . . in other words . . . it's not all about me! It's not all about us! That's our temptation, isn't it? . . . to think about number one . . . to make me nice and safe and secure . . . to be so focused on my own worries that I have no idea . . . or, no interest in what going on around me . . . and we forget who we are . . . we forget that we are people who know what's coming! We forget that we are people who have good news to share: Jesus is coming!

The kingdom of God is near . . . so when you see the signs . . . don't start navel gazing . . . no, stand up . . . raise your heads . . . look up . . . look around . . . look out . . . there's a whole world out there in need of care . . . there's a multitude of people needing to know that God is not capricious and absent and uncaring . . . the kingdom of God is near . . . and, as children of the king, that's our cue . . . to speak of God's grace . . . to live out God's love . . . to hand out the freedom that we know . . . so that people don't have to wait to the end of the world before they meet Jesus.

And, when are we likely to see these signs? Well, they're all around us, aren't they? All the time! They've always been there . . . the scorching sun . . . the moon bloodied by bushfires . . . the surging waves . . . the distress among nations. When the weather bureau sees these signs they recognize them as pointing to El Nino.

What about us . . . the church? Do we recognize the signs? How's your Spanish? Does anyone know how El Nino translates into English? Yes, it means, 'The Child' . . . or, more specifically, 'The Boy'. But, when it is capitalized El Nino is 'The Christ Child'!

Yes, we can learn a lot from the secular world . . . even from the prophets in the Bureau of Meteorology.

So, there's no time like today to raise our heads with hope and with good news for a worried and self-absorbed world. We know what's coming! We know *who's* coming!

Amen.

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