

In Lent, we make the journey with Jesus, through the long wilderness, to the Cross.

In the Old Testament reading this morning, the people of God live an 'in between' life. In between the salvation of God. A salvation that began, in the exodus. A salvation that will conclude, in the promised land. A salvation whose present experience is one of having to make the long, uncomfortable journey in the wilderness. And which characterised the in between life of the people of God.

We, too, live 'in between' lives. In between the salvation of God. A salvation that began, in the Passion of Christ, the once for all salvation event, the new exodus. A salvation that will conclude, in the kingdom of God, the promised land. The promised land, of our own resurrection from the dead, in the future, of the kingdom of God. A salvation whose present experience is one of having to make the long, uncomfortable journey in the wilderness. A wilderness which, as Stephanie prepared us for on the first Sunday in Lent, we are led by the Spirit into, during the present season of Lent. And where, as Stephanie said, we will need to turn and face our demons. Those demons that speak to us, in a very personal way. Lent is an uncomfortable time. But a necessary one. For it is only by turning and facing our demons, that we can become free of them. Free to worship and serve, the living God, alone.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him, may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

In the person and history of Jesus, the future salvation, has now come. The future destiny of the human race, of eternal life, in fellowship with God, has dawned. And all who believe in him, receive that future salvation, already now. The Passion of Christ was God's judgment of the world, in advance. So that all who believe in Jesus, who put their trust in him, live already now, in the kingdom of God.

And yet, the kingdom of God has come, in a very particular way. In the very particular form, of a dawn. A drawing near. It has not yet come in a final way. It is not yet here, in a definitive way. It remains, essentially future. It is only the dawn. It is not yet the new day. This world is an in between world. It lives in the tension between 'the now' and 'the not yet'. In hope. Christianity waits.

For God's final act. An act only begun in Christ Jesus. An act that awaits a final confirmation, by God himself, in the future of his kingdom. The kingdom that is essentially future.

The age of unbelief, began in the 18th century, when the influential German philosopher George Hegel (Heigel) first claimed that with the Reformation, the kingdom of God has now come in all its fullness. So that all that remained was an actualising of that future of perfect justice and peace within the conditions of society. So that all hope in God, and the future of his kingdom, is lost. Which means all belief in God, is lost. Which means, western society, is lost. In the age of unbelief. In the age of secular humanity. In the age of a false claim, to a final perfection of society, apart from God, and the future of his kingdom.

From the very beginning of Christianity, the term antichrist was used to mean, not one figure, but a number of false teachers. Who were at work in the world, to woo away from the true Christ. Who were at work to seduce people, into other claims to universal truth. In our own day, we may see this in the this worldly doctrines of salvation that since Hegel have become the cultural norm in our society. A cultural norm whose anti Christian structure is found in the sacrifice of the individual, the truth about the human person, the truth about each one of us, on the altar of idolatrous ideology. And its atheistic complaint against God, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?'

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light.

By its age of unbelief, by making itself independent of God, the modern world has placed itself in jeopardy of divine judgment. Such as many Christians have seen in the events of the last century. Which a number have seen, in the events of the last year.

All of which makes us more keenly aware of the unpredictability of irrational factors still shaping the course of history. But which need not, can not, must not, dampen our hope. The Christian hope, the hope of the world.

For the more insecure the future of a secular society appears to be, the more confident I feel about the future of religion. Not a future in relation to economic or political liberation. Much of the enthusiasm in such movements seems to me an unintentional contribution to the accelerating the spread of oppressive regimes. But religion in the strict sense of the word can feel more secure today than it has for a long time. It will outlive every ideological regime. And the only serious challenge to Christianity will not be secular society which is badly in need of religious support in our days, but rival religions.