



23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon by Revd Sharmain James



Sunday 13 November 2022

READINGS

Isaiah 65: 17-25; Isaiah 12: 2-6 (replaces Psalm); 2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13; Luke 21 5-19

Situational Awareness

We've all heard the phrase "Be aware of your surroundings." Typically, this saying is used in relation to personal safety. For example, if you're walking alone at night, you should be cognizant of what's going on around you and be prepared to react if you notice a threat.

If you're driving a car, you should be aware of other drivers and try to anticipate their actions, such as someone slamming on their brakes or swerving into your lane. This is also called "Situational Awareness: It's the ability to scan one's surroundings, comprehend their meaning and make quick judgments about what will likely happen next and what decisions you'll need to make as a result.

Take, for example, Captain Chesley "Sully" - whose plane in 2009 ran into a flock of birds during take-off and lost both engines. Refusing to panic and quickly analysing his situation, Captain Sully calmly landed his plane in the Hudson River, saving the lives of all 155 passengers. It is kind of the opposite the way some people live and exist. People that drive or walk in front of oncoming traffic because they are busy texting. There is no denying that the ability to know what's going on so you can figure out what to do is essential to surviving and thriving in life.

In today's Gospel for this penultimate Sunday of the church year, we see Jesus' situational awareness on full display. The disciples had taken a moment to marvel at the temple, which Herod was rebuilding. Historians such as Josephus tell us it was indeed impressive, made of massive stones and decorated with gifts from foreign countries, with doors and gates of the finest craftsmanship. When the people looked at their temple, their hearts swelled with pride. It was a staggering sight.

But if the disciples were hoping to raise Jesus' spirits by their admiration, they failed. Jesus' response, no doubt, left them surprised. Jesus interrupts the disciples' observance of the temple's beauty by boldly stating that a time was coming when the temple towering over them would come crashing to the ground. Undisturbed - Jesus continues to warn his disciples that a time is coming when the world is going to catch fire. There will be wars and famines, epidemics, upheaval. There will be struggles between nations, the fall of great powers and even persecution for those who believe and trust in God. It's coming. And you have to be ready. If you're my disciple, you need to survey the situation. You need to assess what's happening and be aware." Reading Luke 21 is like wearing bifocals – Jesus wants us to see important events from both near and far.

In A.D. 70, that very temple to which Jesus referred to was, in fact, destroyed by the Romans. Along with Jerusalem's fall came intense persecution of Christians, exactly as Jesus said. But his words stretched beyond A.D. 70 into a future that lies ahead of us today. This prophesy – these words of Jesus still have meaning today. Our time too is a time of struggle and judgement. Jesus tells us things are going to get really bad before they get really good.

That is why Jesus wants to see a spiritual situational awareness acted and applied in each one of us. We need to be able to see the signs of the time and respond accordingly. What does it look like to live with the spiritual, situational awareness Jesus encourages in our gospel reading today? Knowing that we live in increasingly difficult times, how do we keep our guard up, our eyes open in the face of dire circumstances - and do things "right. Jesus' press upon us A WAY of viewing things around us. He says: don't see danger – see opportunity.

We all try to avoid stressful situations – but these situations can also be moments when we can truly shine. Struggles will arise – but maybe we shouldn't be so quick to pray it away or avoid them or wish they end quickly – but maybe we should pray for the grace and strength to endure them. If we keep our eyes glued to other things while the road around us becomes more dangerous - the end result will be missed opportunity. Jesus tells his disciples — and us — in verse 13 - that being engaged in the raging world around us will result in an "opportunity to testify". He tells us that as this broken world increasingly shows itself for what it is, in the form of all kinds of strife, struggle and persecution, those disciples standing in the midst of it will be afforded the chance to share with their friends, their families and even their enemies just why this world is so broken (sin) and just who has made and will make it all better. Hard things; unfair things, hurtful things that happen to us are not to be ignored, denied or filled with blame.

Jesus says here that tough things are to be received as moments of witness to him and his promise of life in us. No blame; but opportunity to bear witness to Jesus' grace and love for sinners. No hiding away in fear. No coming out swinging with angry blaming words and retaliation, just receiving of an opportunity to speak of him and his forgiveness. Although Jesus paints a stark picture of what the road to "the end" looks like, HE DID SO NOT TO STIR UP WORRY - and anguish in his people but to do the exact opposite (Luke 21:9). He told us the truth of what was coming so we could have peace. We know that the unknown or uncertainty is the hardest to deal with. He tells us so that we can have peace – and comfort others.

Jesus' goal in getting his disciples, in getting us, ready for the end is to produce a peace in us that understands that despite chaos, God's plan is moving on. Worldwide struggle doesn't mean the world is outside of his divine control. In fact, Jesus wants us to see such "fearful" events as signs of God's activity in bringing things to a joyful conclusion. Meanwhile - As we wait in joyful hope for the coming of Jesus – we are to continue our good work – to be busy about our Father's business. As Paul tells us in today's second reading from Thessalonians – "We are not to be unruly or acting like busy bodies. – instead every body is to be busy about doing good things – telling the good news to others – sharing faith, care and concern for all those who come into our lives.

Situational awareness is looking around — seeing all that our Saviour said was coming to pass — and being motivated by our peace to share the good news that God's plan is taking place.

Such awareness will keep us from being distracted. Amen