

# Two visions of the world

13 November 2022

## INTRODUCING TODAY'S READINGS ...

Good news or bad news? ... we almost always prefer the good news option

There will be peace ... or there will be wars

Long and prosperous life ... or persecution

Being reassuring ... or being radical

It's all up to God ... it's mostly up to us

Interestingly, it is the reading from the prophet Isaiah which leans towards the good news of peace and prosperity and the Gospel of Jesus that leans towards bad news, wars and persecution.

Perhaps it's a case of comfort the afflicted for Isaiah's audience and afflict the comfortable for Luke.

So two starkly contrasting readings, both set down in the Lectionary today.

I wonder which one we are more drawn to and why ...

## BIBLE READINGS

[Isaiah 65:17-25](#)

See, I will create

new heavens and a new earth.

The former things will not be remembered,

nor will they come to mind.

But be glad and rejoice for ever

in what I will create,

for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight

and its people a joy.

I will rejoice over Jerusalem

and take delight in my people;

the sound of weeping and of crying

will be heard in it no more.

Never again will there be in it

an infant who lives but a few days,

or an old man who does not live out his years;

the one who dies at a hundred  
will be thought a mere child;  
the one who fails to reach a hundred  
will be considered accursed.  
They will build houses and dwell in them;  
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.  
No longer will they build houses and others live in them,  
or plant and others eat.  
For as the days of a tree,  
so will be the days of my people;  
my chosen ones will long enjoy  
the work of their hands.  
They will not labour in vain,  
nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune;  
for they will be a people blessed by the Lord,  
they and their descendants with them.  
Before they call I will answer;  
while they are still speaking I will hear.  
The wolf and the lamb will feed together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,  
and dust will be the serpent's food.  
They will neither harm nor destroy  
on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

#### [Luke 21:5-19](#)

Some of Jesus' disciples were remarking about how the Jerusalem temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, 'As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.'

'Teacher,' they asked, 'when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?'

He replied: 'Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, "I am he," and, "The time is near." Do not follow them. When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.' Then he said to them: 'Nation will rise against nation,

and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

‘But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. And so you will bear testimony to me. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. Stand firm, and you will win life.

## MESSAGE Two visions of the world

When we think about ourselves and our place in the world, there are several key factors that shape our outlook.

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*The first is simple **geography** – where we live – whether in Melbourne or on a Pacific island or in Africa*

*Then there is our **personal circumstances** – our health and mobility, our relationships, our wealth, our connections within the community, our work or volunteering or other interests*

*Of course our **culture** shapes us as well – as it is culture that often defines what is accepted and what is valued and sought after – things like youth, beauty, money, aspirations*

*Our **personality** also colours our view of the world – whether we see the world as a friendly or whether as a more hostile place, whether we are naturally pessimistic or optimistic and so forth*

*I would argue that **faith** also shapes our outlook – which informs our attitudes about ourselves and other people as well as our view of God and our place in God’s plans*

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This morning's Bible readings give us *two visions of the world* and our response to the



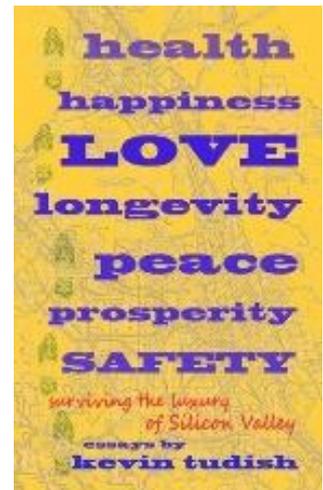
world. The two visions are very different from each other ... they almost feel like complete opposites ... so it's interesting that they are both included in the lectionary on the same day ... which suggests that they both have something important to say to us.

Let's start by seeing where the **current year of 2022** would fit in each vision ...

The Isaiah vision suggests security and prosperity, peace and long life, harmony between all living creatures, God's blessings freely and abundantly available and great joy and delight.

While this is a beautiful and almost utopian vision it doesn't seem a very good description of our current world.

So let's park this vision and come back to it later.



The vision of Jesus in Luke's Gospel suggests a very different world where there is **destruction, wars and conflict between and within nations**. There has hardly been a day this year that the war in Ukraine has not been in the headlines - with many casualties on both sides, daily destruction of both infrastructure and people's lives and with

ramifications rippling across the world with increases in energy prices and shortages of food. And this is the war that we know most about. There are also ongoing wars in places like Burma, Afghanistan, Yemen, South Sudan and elsewhere.



Jesus also mentions **famines, earthquakes and pestilence**.

A huge famine is occurring in East Africa right now, there was a major earthquake in Afghanistan in the middle of the year and the pestilence of Covid is still very much

with us. It's estimated that over 6.5 million people have died so far from Covid, including 12,500 in Australia this year.

Then there are **signs in the heavens** ...

I'm not sure if this week's total lunar eclipse counts but we understand these events much better than the ancients did and so are not nearly as concerned as they were.



Jesus makes it personal for his followers. There will be **persecution, imprisonment, hatred** towards, **betrayal** and even the **killing** of Jesus' followers. Thankfully we don't see much of this in Australia but it's happening in several Middle East and African countries, and from Luke's experience that he writes about in the book of Acts it was widespread and frequent in his day.

All of these events and troubles are **normal** and **expected** according to Jesus and are simply part of living in the world.

Yet if we put them together they are a pretty good summary of our world in 2022 – such that Jesus' vision of the future as described in Luke feels remarkably accurate. So we might



conclude that Jesus' vision is more accurate than Isaiah's vision – our world really is in a bit of a mess!

**But how are we to live faithfully in the world Jesus sketches out?**

How do we resist the temptation to just **blend into** our culture to avoid discrimination or rejection or avoid becoming anxious, worried or afraid about the world?

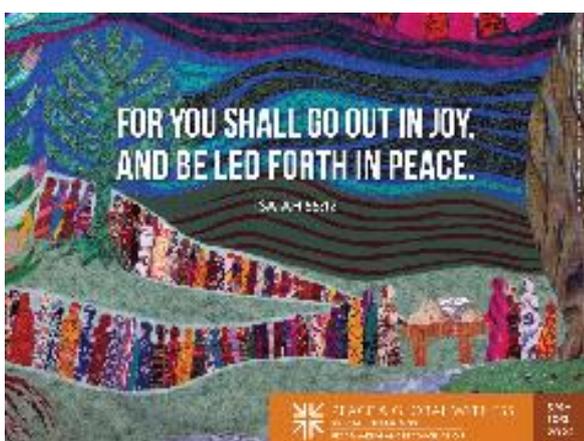
- The first thing to note is that this vision is **realistic**.
- Our world **does** have multiple troubles.
- Life is a **struggle** for many people.

We can easily **worry** about the future – whether it's worrying about a resurgence of covid, or the war in Ukraine, or the climate emergency we face or the daily worry about rising prices.

The advice Jesus offers is to **stand firm** and to **trust** that Jesus will come to our side when we need help the most. It's a call to **faithful witness** – to continue to shine the light of Jesus to those around us – to offer **hospitality** and **hope** when otherwise we might get depressed at the state of the world – and to continue to have courage to **speak about** our faith in Jesus. But there's no getting around the fact that Jesus predicts tough times and our faith is not a magical shield against pain or struggle.

The reward for our faithful endurance is **life**.

And then there is the other vision from Isaiah – the expansive and almost utopian vision that God will make everything new. How are we to hold this more hopeful vision in tension with the rather grim vision from Jesus?



Isaiah uses what is sometimes called **prophetic imagination** to paint a picture of life as God intends it to be. In many ways it represents a vision of what we inwardly **long for** – that we could live securely, where hard work is rewarded, where people live long and fruitful lives and where there is harmony or peace between people, between nations and

throughout creation.

The Hebrew term to describe such an ideal world is **shalom**, or peace.

While this vision may point towards an alternative reality to what we see before us most nights on the TV news, what Isaiah is describing is really the **kingdom of God**. It's a world where God is actively involved, where God hears our cries and answers, where there is joy and blessing. It's the world that Jesus sought to inaugurate in his ministry, bringing healing and hope and wholeness to people and to communities.



While such a vision may seem far-fetched or foolish, it's the same vision that we are invited to imagine and inhabit during the season of **Advent**. It's the vision that the

young dreamer Mary sings about in the Magnificat and that older faithful people like Zechariah and Simeon sing about. The world may indeed be in a bit of a mess, but those who share this prophetic imagination can see a **different** world where there is **joy and justice, peace and love**, where people experience God's blessing.

Many Jewish people – both in the time of Jesus and through the centuries since – longed for such a world. It is often expressed as the **messianic kingdom**, what the world will look like when the Messiah comes.

It's one reason why many people were excited and inspired to follow Jesus when they heard him speak about God's kingdom and saw how he healed people. But equally it's a reason why many other people turned their backs on Jesus because they didn't see this vision being fulfilled – the Romans were still in charge of the country, corrupt and greedy priests were still in charge of the temple and life was a struggle.

In theological terms it's sometimes called the **now and not yet of God's kingdom** ... the vision of Isaiah was starting to be fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus – the **now** of God's kingdom – but injustice, pain and struggle continued. Hence the **not yet** of God's kingdom.



So we actually need **both** of the visions we've explored this morning.

The Isaiah vision paints a bold picture of how God intends the world to be when everyone is able to sit under their own fig tree and enjoy life's blessings. We long for this to come about. We're invited to pray for it to be so.

Jesus' vision in our second reading is more sombre and more realistic of where we find ourselves today. Life is a struggle and we sometimes wonder where God is or what God is up to in our world. We are called to be faithful and to endure and to remain God's people in our neighbourhood.

Holding the two visions together is a bit like the poem that's found in the often neglected book of Ecclesiastes ...

There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens:

a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.

May God give us wisdom and patience, energy and hope as we live through the tough times and as we look to co-operate with God in building God's kingdom in our midst.

