

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

Isaiah 65:17-25; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19

Hope in the Face of Despair

What do we do when so much in our world – globally, nationally, and perhaps, personally – feels uncertain – when so many in our society live in despair?

Today's readings speak directly into this reality. They don't deny the brokenness or sense of despondency, but they offer a vision, a calling, and a promise. Together, they remind us that Christian hope isn't a passive waiting – it's active, courageous living.

In the 6th century B.C., a prophet speaks words that can still lift our hearts:

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

This isn't a vague dream. It's a concrete vision of what can and shall be:

People building houses and living in them.
Planting vineyards and enjoying their fruit.
Children living long lives.
Wolves and lambs feeding together.

It's a picture of peace and justice – of people flourishing.

It's quite some vision! But is this just wishful thinking?

If we're to affirm that God is God, then it must be rooted in reality.

The vision begins with God saying, 'I am about to create...' This is God's initiative. The future doesn't depend on human ingenuity alone – it rests on God's faithfulness.

When our lives are clouded in darkness, when the world seems a dismal place – the prophet reminds us: God is faithful, and one day God's promises, will be fulfilled. New life shall return, for God is at work.

A word that keeps cropping up throughout the Bible is *hope*. Hope places everything into a new perspective. It doesn't mean that what we might be facing now isn't important, that it's not painful or frightening, but that God is in all things – that somehow, God's purposes are being worked out. Brokenness shall give way to beauty and darkness to light.

This vision isn't meant to make us passive. Hope leads to action. It shapes how we live now. If God's future is peace, then we work for peace today. If God's future is justice, then we seek justice now. If God's future is harmony with creation, then we care for the earth today.

We move on to the 1st century. Paul writes to a community that expected Christ's return at any moment. Some had even stopped working, thinking, "Why bother? The end is near. Let's hang around and wait for Christ to come back."

Paul's response is blunt: "Anyone unwilling to work shouldn't eat." But his deeper point is this: Christian hope doesn't lead to idleness. It leads to engagement. He says: "Do not be weary in doing what is right."

Christ may come tomorrow, and he may not. But the Bible is very clear: when his return will be, isn't our concern. Our responsibility is to get on with living now; knuckle down and make God's love and

justice real here and now.

Waiting for Christ isn't passive. It's active faithfulness – working, serving, loving. For us, this means resisting despair when the world feels overwhelming. It means continuing to do good, even when results seem slow.

Our daily work – whether in ministry, family, or community – is part of God's renewing work. Every act of loving kindness, every word of truth, every effort for justice is a sign of God's kingdom breaking in.

John Wesley was out in his garden hoeing, and a visitor asked him: "What would you do if you knew that tomorrow the world would end?" Wesley replied, "I would finish hoeing my garden."

In the Gospel passage Jesus speaks of wars, earthquakes, and persecution. The disciples admire the temple's majestic beauty, but Jesus says: "Not one stone will be left upon another." The temple – the glorious symbol of permanence – will fall, and so it did as the Romans decimated Jerusalem. And by the time Luke wrote his Gospel, Christians were being imprisoned and martyred.

While these sobering words reflect actual events that occurred in the 1st century, they resonate today. Against this backdrop, Jesus doesn't leave them, or us, in fear. He says: "By your endurance you will gain your souls."

Endurance here isn't grim survival. It's steadfast hope.

It's holding on to Christ when the world trembles.

Jesus promises that even in trial, God will give words and wisdom.

Even when betrayed, God will not abandon us.

This isn't a call to panic but to trust.

When everything seems shaky, God's kingdom endures.

Isaiah gives us the vision: God is making all things new.

Paul gives us the practice: keep doing good, keep working faithfully.

Jesus gives us the posture: endure with hope, trust in God's promises.

So, what does this mean for us today?

When the news is filled with conflict, we live as peacemakers.

When creation groans, we care for the earth.

When life feels uncertain, we hold fast to Christ and encourage one another.

We are a people of hope – not because the life is easy, but because God is faithful. And that hope leads us to action. That hope makes us subversive people – for we dare to announce – we dare to work for something new and beautiful and creative – we dare to share in working with God in recreating all that is.

God of new beginnings,
strengthen us to live with hope,
to work with faith,
and to endure with courage,
that we may bear witness to your kingdom in all we do.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Alister Hendery – Preached at Waiapu Cathedral – 16.11.2025