

SERMON KRIJTBERG SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 13TH 2021
on Daniel, 12, 1 – 3 and Mark, 13, 24 – 32.
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Times were hard, my dear friends, when the prophet Daniël saw the vision that he talks about in today's first reading. It was a time, when a man sat on the throne of Israel, who tried to introduce modern, secular Hellenistic thoughts and practices that were an abomination to those Jewish people who remained faithful to the Tora, the faith of their fathers. Civil war broke out and many people fled to the mountains or were killed by the tyrant. It was a time 'unsurpassed in distress', Daniël writes. But in the middle of this time of crisis he saw Michael, the archangel, rising up as the guardian of the people, to rescue them in the name of the Lord, their God. In Daniël's vision God came to liberate his people through the intervention of an archangel. In the history of the day it was the family of the Maccabees who started the liberation war that finally ended the rule of the tyrant. But the reason this story is relevant for us today is, that people were convinced that it was God who came to their rescue. It is that faith that gave them the power and conviction to resist, to not give up nor give in to threats and to the brutality of the powers that be.

When Mark wrote his gospel the situation in Palestine was disastrous. The Roman suppression was harsh and every attempt to shake off the yoke of the occupation was met by ever more brutal force. In those days, Mark writes, 'the sun nor moon or stars will give light'. The situation felt so hopeless and dark that he turns to apocalyptic imagery. But his faith in Jesus as the savior of his people remained unshaken and he is convinced that God will remain faithful to his promise to be with Jesus' followers every day until the end of time. In his vision Mark already sees 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory to gather Jesus' followers and keep them safe.

Did it happen in real time just as Mark had seen it in his love and faith in Jesus? No, it did not. In fact, the Romans made it even worse. They destroyed Jerusalem and its temple and scattered the people all over the neighboring countries. But they could not crush the faith of the people. Even through centuries of persecution they were not able to suppress the love and faith of the Christians. Jesus felt always with them, coming to their rescue, encouraging the fearless and welcoming the victims. He always remained inspirational and a great guide to follow. Our presence here tonight is proof of the strength of their belief in God's saving power and trustworthy love.

The crises we are facing today, my dear friends, are very different from what threatened the people in biblical times. But they are by no means less frightening. A virus is threatening our health and even the lives of many people. We do not seem to be able to suppress this infection and are visited by this virus in wave after wave. How is our faith in God's saving presence helping and encouraging us under these circumstances? And at the same time the clock of climate change is ticking louder and louder and the prognoses for the rising of world-temperature become ever more negative.

The past two weeks the leaders of our nations came together in Glasgow to find ways and means to keep climate change within a warming of 1.5 or 2 degrees centigrade. I think by now everyone must be convinced of the urgency of this issue, and still there was a lot of talk

talk in Glasgow and there were plenty of promises. It even resulted in some real decisions. But are we convinced that now we have succeeded in keeping our world, our common home, safe and inhabitable? Or do we once again put our trust in God relying on His saving power?

There still seem to be people who do just that, even in an absolute way. People who do not want to be vaccinated, because that would be against our total trust in our Lord. People who think that whatever we do to reduce our 'carbon footprint' is useless. Only God, in His almighty power, is able to clear up the mess we made of His creation. So just wait and see and trust in God!

And then on the other hand many more people have given up trusting in God altogether to be our savior. Why did He not save all the people in times gone by, who suffered and prayed in days of famine, war, natural disasters or earlier pandemics? We hear it again and again: Where was God in Auschwitz? He did not come in the clouds with mighty power and glory. If God exists, is He to be trusted to be true to His word, to be our Savior?

These are difficult questions but rightly asked, the readings the Church offers us today challenge us to ask them. Where was the archangel in Glasgow bringing courage to the participants at the UN climate conference, helping them reach selfless and decisive decisions. Where is our savior in hospitals, overcrowded and understaffed, where people fight for their lives and the lives of others? Countless prayers are being uttered and many hope for a saving God.

All of that is our utterly human thinking. We tend to think in terms of greatness and in terms of power and might. We tend to think in terms of winning, conquering, being stronger, with God as the strongest of all. We have made of God a mighty king and ruler over all the world. God never did so himself. He told Moses in the desert that He would be there for him always. God does not want to be great as we imagine Him. He just wants to be there, wants to be loved, to be trusted. God wants to be there for you and for me and He asks us: Do you trust me? Will you let me be your God without prescribing me what to do? Will you stay in contact with me, loving, hopeful, in whatever situation? In the storm I will be there, in the heatwave as much as in the autumn sunshine. I will be at your side in hospital. I will be encouraging you in every effort you make to save the climate and to help your neighbor. I came to you as a baby, trusting you with my life. I died for you as a criminal, a slave, so that you would recognize me in times of distress. I will never get in your way with my greatness. But I will always be at your side. You can go on doing what you need to do, but trust me to be with you all the days of your life.

Amen.