

## Hope in the Face of Apocalypse

We humans have been preoccupied with the 'end times' since before the beginnings of philosophical thought. Benjamin Franklin saying 'The only two things that are certain in life are death and taxes' is funny because it is true. When you think about it, it makes sense. Death is a natural part of life. Knowing that there is an end defines how we live and who we chose to be as people. We don't like to think about it, but intellectually we know that death is a natural part of the human experience. Given our own contemplation of mortality, it makes sense that we would turn to contemplating the life and death of the world and even existence itself and what would these end times look like?

The apocalyptic imagination has existed since the written word and continues on today. One apocalyptic image in the dead seas scrolls has Melchizedek who is a divine, angelic figure who appears as a Priest of God in Genesis (and also referred to in the Psalms and Hebrews), comes down in divine grandeur on the 50th Jubilee to expediate humanity for their sins and in judgement. The Gospels describe the end times as a thief in the night with further visions of the 'rapture' where people are 'beamed up' or raised up into the heavens before the real problems begin. Revelation is full of apocalyptic imagery with grand battles, enigmatic signs, fire and judgement.

Throughout the ages people have had visions, made predictions, and told stories about the world dying or ending. This is still keenly evident today. 2 years ago Harold Camping, Californian family radio announcer predicted the rapture for May 21st, 2011 and the end of the world on October 21, 2011. Over this 5-6 mth period was to be the

end times. Even on a pop culture level - people are using their imaginations of great last battles - end of the world type thing, for television shows, books or movies. Last century people read the genius of Tolkien and Lewis in the Lord of the Rings and Narnia series - all which ended in a final battle against good and evil that was going to change the world no matter the outcome. Today we see the apocalyptic imagination alive and well in T.V shows like 'The Walking Dead' and modern day Zombie culture. The award winning book and T.V. series 'Game of Thrones' is a bloodthirsty battle between great houses, meanwhile in the background we know that they are all about to be called to rally together to face what could be the end - a battle against great odds. Winter is coming. It is in the 'rallying together' against great odds - where hope is to be found. When we stand together as one, trusting in what we believe in.

One of the main crisis points with these stories is that the characters (or real life people) have to face a crisis of conscience. A moment of conscience where they are offered a choice - the easy way out or where they have to followed the hard road - the road less travelled. Frodo is tempted to give into the power of the ring and Edmond has to chose what he is willing to live for and what he would die for. These are the moments where life changes so rapidly and is forever changed - and suddenly you are facing formidable odds and death. You life changes so dramatically and traumatically suddenly you find yourself asking 'How do I live?'

We all have personal philosophies and beliefs that we live by. As Christian people we know that we are to live with integrity, and honesty, truth, love, mercy and compassion. We are to act with courage, mercy and justice - always thinking of each other and putting other people first. How easy do these life creeds and christian beliefs go out

the window when our greatest fears happen? Suddenly we are tempted like Frodo with the Ring to live in selfishness, to look out for number one, to lie and cheat or to place blame and to finish it off go into denial. Or like Edmond who had betrayed his family and put the world at great risk, had to make a choice in how to live and the only way he could make this choice was to find a belief that was pure and beautiful displayed in self sacrifice and love when Aslan offered his own life for Edmond. Edmond wasn't sure about beliefs he to live by, Aslan gave him beliefs to die by.

End times and death are not concepts that are far off in our future. Death and the end of times are a physical reality in the world we live in. We as Christian people need to believe in who we are in the world and how we are to live in the face of tragedy, change, trauma, betrayal, death and life changing events. We need to be consistent in what we believe as Christians and how we behave as Christian people. Even in the face of crisis. This is where hope is waiting.

The Church is currently undergoing a time of radical change and opposition. Our historic failings as a Church is currently manifested as the Royal Commission into responses to institutional sexual abuse. Where we as a Church are forced to confront what has happened behind closed doors while no one was watching. For the last 2 weeks, the Anglican Church of Grafton has appeared before the Royal Commission due to mismanagement in responding to 41 victims of abuse from one of their children's homes. The bishop and registra admitted that they were driven by fear in their response. In this case financial fear. The diocese had been experiencing financial difficulty before the class action - having 41 wounded people coming forward asking for over \$4million sent the hierarchy into a tail spin of liability and legality.

Neglecting their pastoral, theological and procedural beliefs.

The Bishop and registrar are not bad people or morally bankrupt - they are merely fallible people. However, in this case, in the face of fear, ruin and death, the Church wavered from their beliefs of who we are in the world. Instead of trusting in our Christian mess and being a beacon of light and hope in the darkest of times - we abandoned who we are as Church. I say 'we' because 'we are all one body'. The Church was influenced by fear and panic - which leads to terrible things. Fear and panic is the opposite of hope.

The theme of end times is not just a preoccupation of humanity or a concept that institutes face, we face it everyday of our lives. Everyday something ends, changes or ceases to be. They mostly pass us by without a second thought. Other events stop us in our tracks. Like the death of a loved one and moving through the grief and fear as life gradually rebuilds itself into a new and different life. It could be financial crisis or job related, political or a relationship breakdown or divorce. In these events we need to trust in new life. That something new will grow and it will be beautiful in its own right. But like the apocalyptic imagination - we don't know for sure what this new life looks like - but we can imagine, hope and create.

All of these things force us to test our beliefs and in some cases throw them out the window. I would maintain that this is where our beliefs as a Christian person matter the most. In times of darkness - Christian hope shines like a beacon of love and surety. When we act in this 'hope', we infect all those around us, providing them with a guiding light, inspiring hope and courage in those around us. These are the characters in any

story that are the linchpin to any group. Like Samwise to Frodo who stood with him all the way to Mt. Doom because of what he believed in. These characters whose beliefs are so beautiful and true that not only do they live by them, but they would die by them.

We are not people of death, we are people of the resurrection. People of new life and hope and we need to live in that. Even in the face of our biggest fears. We do this because of our courage, our hope, our love of truth and our compassion for each other. We need to be the people we talk about being and mean it.

Although to confront our greatest fears may feel like the end of the world. We need to trust in the hope that we have been given. A God that loves us, who experiences what we go through, a God that promises that we will exist forever in love, that there will always be new life. Even the greatest of our fears are not as fearsome as the apocalyptic images in scripture and other literature. Yet even in these images - the message is of hope. No matter how bad it gets, never let go of the new life to come. No matter how hard it gets, never forget who you are. A child of God, and a beacon of Hope that brings life to the world and your life should reflect that.