

“Morning Report” a sermon based on 2 Samuel 23:1-7, Revelation 1:4-8, John 18:33-37, preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Sunday 25 November 2018.

I have heard a little about what people here do first thing in the morning: Cups of tea or coffee, newspaper, radio, Bible, prayer.

But I wonder what enters our minds in the morning, before we are fully awake ... before we say a word or respond to an outside stimulus?

First thing in the morning in my life, after the alarm sounds, involves listening to *Morning Report* on national radio. With journalists intent on catching out a politician for an inconsistency or mistake – gotcha! And a politician saying as much as they can without being caught - “gotcha”.

Media training says it is important to work out before the interview begins the few things you can positively say and then find every which way to say those things without it being irritatingly obvious. Because what is said helps frame how people think about an issue, the trajectory on which they are set. You want them to have in mind what you stand for.

The first thoughts of morning set a tone for the day.

I noticed the mention of morning in the Bible readings today.

The Samuel text: The light of morning ... Sun rising on a cloudless day ... Grass gleaming after rain fall.

There is also a climatic reference in the Revelations reading: “Christ is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him.”

In those first half-formed thoughts, who do we see coming towards us?

By the time we have heard a few minutes of the news, there are more figures than we need, including often President Trump.

Or we may have in mind a figure remembered from a dream or a story we have read.

Who we see coming towards us influences what we take into the day. What we imagine first makes a difference to how we respond during the day.

2 Samuel 23 is a kind of appendix, focusing on the justness of David: a just ruler who enables the day to be cloudless and the grass to gleam after rainfall

The book of Revelation is written to a church overwhelmed by an oppressive empire. Days that were unrelentingly bleak and cloudy.

But who comes riding on the cloud? Christ, the faithful witness, the ruler of the kings of the earth.

John's gospel speaks of Christ as one who came to testify to the truth. In an age of untruth and partial truth, the promise is that truth will intrude, that truth will prevail.

Clouds or cloudless ...

Our approach to each day is framed by who we see coming towards us in those first thoughts. Marcus Aurelius ... "Our life is what our thoughts make it."

Pope Pius XI instituted The Feast of Christ the King in 1925. It is perhaps the most political of the feasts of the church. The pope was concerned with the increasing rise of secularism throughout Europe - the denial of Christ as king. He was witnessing the rise of non-Christian or nominally Christian dictatorships. He saw rulers making fearful promises. He was horrified to find that Christians were persuaded by those leaders.

If the figure who frames our day is the Christ, we can believe there is a truth beyond untruth, something more complete beyond partial truth.

There are possibilities beyond even the most powerful dictator, beyond the devastation of the earth. There are possibilities in the day beyond what seems on the surface to be unable to change. Nothing is closed and determined. Nothing need stay the same. No one is forever imprisoned.

The spiritually dead are those with no possibilities for life, no capacity to be different. Yet Christ is the firstborn of the dead, the spirit of new life, the leader of resurrection people. Even the dead can be raised.

J B Jones, a Baptist preacher from Louisiana, tells the story of the great jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis at a gig in Manhattan one night. He was playing '*I don't stand a ghost of a chance with you*' and reached a dramatic moment when a mobile phone rang in the audience. Audience and trumpeter paused in a moment of tension, just as a congregation might in the midst of worship, and the embarrassed phone owner hurriedly silenced his phone. Then Marsalis gently began to play again, seamlessly improvising around the phone's ringtone until he resolved the improvisation back to that very moment of interruption in his harmony. The great king of jazz had woven the discordant fragment back into a re-created and beautiful whole.

The British theologian Sam Wells says this about what happened:

'Christ is like that great jazz trumpeter. Christ is playing a tune, a song of love, and longing, and desire for us. And we are like a mindless mobile phone that rings discordantly and threatens to ruin the whole of this dazzling creation. And Christ pauses. And there's that moment of dramatic tension and grief and anger and loss, which we could call judgment. And then slowly, painstakingly, but eventually thrillingly and joyfully, Christ weaves us back into the improvised melody until all is resolved and in harmony for ever. That's out of this world. That's the gospel. That's what it means to say Christ is king.'

Not a dictator, rather a king who riffs off, improvises around, releases, forgives, opens out possibilities.

Now if that is the figure we imagine coming to us in the early morning,

the ruler who is true and just and powerful and most of all loving, then

we will look for signs of that rule through the day

we will listen for sounds of hope

we will expect to experience love

and our life will be open to life-giving surprise.

It may not be natural to us though.

It takes the disciplines of Bible meditation and persistent praying to train us into seeing Christ coming to us in the morning.

Then we might see how the grass can gleam after rainfall and the clouds carry good news.

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