

33rd Sunday (B)

- The leader of a certain American Indian tribe was dying; for many generations his people had been encamped at the base of a large mountain.
- *The chief summoned his three sons & said: "I am dying; but before my death I must choose one of you to succeed me as the head of our tribe. I have the same task for each of you; I want you to climb our holy mountain & bring me back something beautiful; the one whose gift is the most outstanding will be the one who will succeed me."*
- The following morning the sons set out on their search, each taking a different path to the top of the holy mountain & returned several days later.
- The first brought his father a flower which grew near the summit of the mountain; it was extremely rare & beautiful.
- The second son brought his father a valuable stone, round & colourful, which had been polished by rain & sandy winds.
- When the third son approached his father, everyone saw that his hands were empty; he said to his father: *"I have brought back nothing to show you, father. As I stood on the top of the holy mountain, I saw that on the other side was a beautiful land filled with green pastures. In the middle of these pastures there is a crystal lake, & I have a vision of where our tribe could go for a better life. I was so overwhelmed with what I saw & by what I could see that I could not bring anything back."*
- And the father replied: *"You shall be our tribe's new leader, for you have brought back the most precious thing of all — the gift of a vision for a better future."*
- There have been so many things happening in recent times that it has led some to talk about the end of time & the destruction of the world, or at least the urgency of making decisions for change - in many ways we seem to be at a turning-point in history.
- It was also similar when Mark wrote his Gospel when there was widespread oppression & persecution of the Christian community in Rome.
- No doubt Jesus' followers are wondering if the end is near, uncertain in their suffering how things are going to turn out.
- To give his readers hope, Mark gives them Jesus' vision of the future.
- The vision of the future doesn't look very appealing at first reading.
- Jesus imagines a time of terror & trouble & persecution; people will be betrayed & handed over to the authorities; there will be wars & earthquakes & famines - Jesus says, *"These things must happen."*
- After this catalogue of disaster there is the good news.
- Jesus looks beyond the time of distress to the final time, when the Son of Man will gather the scattered people of God to himself.
- Jesus sees beyond the suffering & persecution to a future of peace with God.

- This vision of peace is important for Mark's persecuted community: If their hope is not to be exhausted by force of circumstances, they need help to imagine a time beyond the pain & suffering.
- These are some of the crises in our own time: the violence & oppression of people that forces them from their homelands; the current Climate Change Conference in Glasgow; the Pandemic & its related abundant conspiracy theories; closer to home, the decisions that need to be made about the use of fossil fuels & the development of sustainable alternative sources of energy; in the Church globally, we are asked to consider what it means to be a synodal Church that listens to the world & its members & make decisions for actions in corresponsable ways; locally we are in the Plenary process of discerning how God calls us to be Church in the future in Australia; & in our diocese we are to make decisions about structures & relationships between our parishes for their viability.
- In response to all these pressing issues there will always be doomsday prophets, or populist leaders who provide simplistic solutions that usually blame sections of society for the ways things are, & so they're almost always divisive & destructive; other elements of society that resist or refuse change at all costs, & sometimes there are those who are true leaders who impart a vision of hope in which we can all participate.
- We come to a turning-point in various aspects of our society, a time of trial, not all of a sudden, because we have been heading down a particular road of violence over people, or exploitation of the earth's resources, or abuse of power, or simply an unpreparedness for necessary change without taking their consequences seriously, because we have refused to learn.
- In all sections of society & in the Church we need leadership with a vision of realistic hope, & we are all to 'prepare the future', not just by passively awaiting to what is to come, but by helping to shape it, energized by the Spirit of God to dream & work towards a future envisioned by God.
- It is what we really pray for in the Lord's Prayer when we say – "Your Kingdom Come, on earth as it is in heaven".
- If we take that seriously, we will strive with God's help, to shape a future together that is consistent with God's dream for us all.