

I'm angry

Luke 21:25-36'

J Shannon

I'm angry¹. I don't know about you – but I'm angry. I'm angry at all those people who are angry. I'm watching the demonstrations in all the capital cities, with all the same props and all the same signs. And I'm angry. I'm angry that good people are being manipulated. I'm angry because social media is the latest pandemic we have to fight. I'm angry because good people don't even know why they are angry.

Last Christmas we talked about how we had the tools for restoration. The hay was in – there was a light shining in the near distance as vaccines began to roll out. I said, 'We have remained a nation of kindness and peace throughout the storm. Hope has returned. It's time to rebuild.'

And this year, much of the hay (and wheat) is under waters and me thinks the light at the end of the tunnel might just have been another train...but that's not true.

Let's look at who's angry and why – and how today's readings might fit into the scheme of things and then we might talk about what we might do over the next 4 weeks – or life time.

We were all so positive last Christmas with the vaccine rollout just on the horizon and you'd think that as the vaccines have reached over 90% of Australian, generally, the population would be ecstatic. Back then, there was such a community feeling, and now, suddenly the streets are full of people marching for "freedom" – after the lockdowns have more or less ended. Hmm. What is all this stuff about individualistic freedom?? Why is the 'I' more important than the 'we'?

¹ It seems I'm into comedians this month. Last week I mentioned Lenny Bruce. This week, I am channelling Dave Hughes. Dave used to start his comedy skits by naming an emotion – and then explaining why.

Many of you attended the grief workshop where we described 7 different kinds of grief. (Good grief! that's a lot of grief) We all know the difference between feeling sad because our goldfish died and the deep grief when we lose someone. The one grief we didn't have time to truly explore was ambiguous grief. And sadly, that is the one that needs the most examining right now.

Ambiguous grief is grief that can't be identified to a specific source. It is a bit like a fungus. Young people are feeling enormous grief and do not know what to do with it. There is the grief of all the things they *didn't* do – don't ask them to name them, they can't. It just feels like they missed out. Fear of missing out is one of the primary motivating factors for humans between the ages of 2 and 30. Almost all our advertising is built on that. Black Friday hammered us with the idea that we would miss out if we didn't buy, NOW!

Then there is a pile of things they *know* they didn't do:

- Chat up that girl in chemistry class
- Go to a friend/sister/brother's wedding
- Many were excited about leaving home for Uni, new friends, freedom...– not studying on line in their old bedroom.

You can't get back these things.

There was also a bucket load of what felt like missed opportunities

And then waves of COVID infections pulverised anticipation –hope? soon, doors are opening,

no they're not,

a little freedom, yea! Then snatched away. Prisoners of war are tortured with hope and anticipation and eventually they break down.

Add this to background angst – the media telling a generation they'll never be able to afford a home and the Glasgow climate change debacle – just as the world starts to open – it all looks – well, not worth it²

² Holland, Belgium and Austria – all in lockdown again.

No one can understand another person's grief. We don't have any rituals to recognise what these people (and us) have lost.

The most common response to grief – is anger. Because in grief you feel powerless and inert. In anger, you are motivated and alive. These demonstrations are not about vaccines – they are about feeling powerless. People desperately want some control in a world that doesn't feel controllable. And ironically, their battle for 'individual freedom' makes them feel part of something – a collective. It is a mud puddle where everyone hurts just like you do – and one might think, 'these are my people!'

Once we had a sense of identity, an Australian mindset which thankfully, was somewhat cynical. We were an island a long, long way from anywhere except NZ. But social media is so pervasive, there are no borders. Kids all over the world wear the same clothes, make the same gestures and use universal Emojis to obliterate the need for language and grammar. They have no boundaries and cannot tell the difference between incidents across the world or down the street; one government or another. Did you notice the placards and props you saw in Melbourne demonstrations were the *exact* same that the crowd are carried in NY? One Melbournian even carried a handwritten sign saying he wanted his 14th amendment rights back! (we don't have a 14th amendment).

Long ago, Australians chose a collective freedom. We wear seatbelts³. We don't litter. It is a freedom that allows us to walk to school or the supermarket and know we won't be shot. We are free to mix with each other again because we cared enough for one another to get vaccinated.

The threats and the demands are uncivilised and contrary to how we see our society. And there will always be Politicians who are quick to try and harness the disaffection and anger. Divided society is rewarding to them in voting preferences.

Outsourcing to minor political players will not be the answer – but it is certainly attractive to hand it over to someone else to solve the 'problem'. The problem of 'freedom'.

³ My Chinese students you to ask me why a free country had so many rules.

Quick – let's look at the readings!

Nations will be confused by the roaring of the sea...people will faint with fear and foreboding of what's coming upon the world... and so Luke tells us of the coming of 'the son of man'. Sure feels like the time is ripe.

Now here's the thing, Jesus did not come to save the world – he came to save you!

²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because **your** redemption is drawing near.

We were told when we were young to 'hand it over to Jesus' but I don't think it meant 'wait for someone else to do it'. Handballing it to Jesus isn't the answer. Jesus came to remind you that the God's realm is bigger than us – that the kingdom of God can be in this mess and to give you the power and faith to save the world. One act of kindness at a time.

Let us be grown up enough to name grief as grief. We have suffered. Hold His hand for strength and he will weep for what you've lost – and you can too. Then embrace the precious child that is anticipation. Just as new parents are terrified and infatuated – embrace this fragile child.

We know that our anticipation for a new beginning; an end to this chaos is fraught with disappointments. 'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation (and drunkenness) and the worries of this life, ...³⁵' Knowing all this, we still need to stand up.

"God came for mornings such as this, with the same haggard face, with the same questions, with the same anger, with the same sense of loss and hopelessness, but with deep wells of grace from which we can drink, with compassion which will never end, with comforting arms which will not grow weary, with hope which stretches from everlasting to everlasting."⁴ (Tom Shuman)

Liberation comes in finding a place for inner hope and healing within the contradictions and questions of living this life, in this world. Liberation is in

⁴ Tom Shuman – For Mornings such as these, Advent Call, WildGoose publishing

setting ourselves free to be steady, be faithful and help others heal. Liberate us to recognise and walk with grief.

Liberate us from the new pandemic – fear and mistrust, anger and violence.

Because here we are at Advent. It has been quite a journey. As Christians, no matter what, and despite all odds, we look forward to a new beginning. The birth of hope and joy which we, as midwives, will deliver with faith and peace.

The Lord is coming.

Thank you, Lord, in this first week of Advent

For breaking again into our world in all its hopes and pains

And complexities.

We are grateful for every sign of your liberating love within that world and in ourselves.