

Fires and Floods - does God care?

Isaiah 42¹⁻⁹; Psalm 29; Acts 10³⁴⁻⁴³; Matthew 3^{13-end}

*The Lord is enthroned above the waterflood; the Lord sits enthroned as king for evermore.
[Psalm 29⁹]*

Who could watch the news and see Australia burn, or think about a world on the brink of conflict as super-egos threaten each other knowing that others will have to pay the price for their words, or consider those who suffer because of water that is overwhelming, or know that so many in our world go without food or shelter or healthcare and not feel moved to despair?

In the Old Testament when such catastrophic events happen it would be recorded as God's response to a people who rejected him and the prophets would be calling people to respond in repentance and by turning back to God. That is the pattern throughout the history and prophetic books.

A century ago the response would have been one where people were driven to prayer and seeking God; up to twenty years ago people would have been asking where was God as surely a loving God could not have permitted this; but now the response is almost total indifference - God isn't blamed because God isn't part of the equation!

As a priest it is my duty to reflect on this with you and somehow to put God back into the mix. There are two things that I think should be said:

- ✠ The first is to reflect on the nature of God as we have it in the readings from Isaiah and in the Psalm.

We are inclined to begin with the things that make us feel good: **a bruised reed he will not break, a dimly burning wick he will not quench, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring prisoners from the dungeon.** It makes more sense to begin with God - **I am the Lord, that is my name, my glory I give to no other.** It is this God of whom the Psalmist concentrates on his voice: **the voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the voice of the Lord is mighty in operation; the voice of the Lord is a glorious voice; the voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees; the voice of the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon; the voice of the Lord splits the flash of lightning; the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the voice of the Lord makes the oak**

trees writhe and the result is that **in his temple all cry, 'Glory!'**

From the readings today we learn about God's priorities. Isaiah tells us that one is to pursue **justice** and Acts teaches us that **God shows no partiality** and that leads to **peace by Jesus Christ** and that **everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.**

Perhaps we ignore God because we know that he really does fulfil what he says matters to him and that we want to forget the trust he places on us to care for the planet, to pursue justice and live selflessly for his sake.

- ✠ The second is to learn from the Baptism of Jesus who was born into our humanity and baptised into our death, showing that God is fully immersed into our pain and limitation.

God in Christ decides not to stand apart from the mess and pain and hope and joy in humanity, but enters fully into life as we experience it so that we may share in the life he intended for us.

As Christ embraces the hopelessness of the cross he lets go of that desperation that comes from focusing only on the immediate. From before time was created through to when time will have ended this was the moment in which faith and hope came together. We know for a certainty that all will be well because God has made it so.

Certainly, there is a need to call people to prayer, to repentance and faith: it is the most appropriate response to human disaster. But there is also the need to see God in Christ sharing the pain and teach us not to focus on the immediate but to see things from God's perspective: then there is hope.