

God has a plan for the world and for us.

Sermon for the last Sunday before Advent.

Readings: Colossians 1: 15-20
Luke 23:33-43

You'll probably have seen those holographic pictures, which were in fashion a few years ago: you stare and stare at all those shimmering colours and can't see anything. And then all of a sudden you see an eagle or something. You'd looked for ages and seen nothing, and then all of a sudden you see it, and you wonder why you hadn't before. I'll come back to that.

Let's take a very jaundiced look at our lives for a moment: we're born and spend, say, 20 years growing up, most of us fairly happily; we get a job if we're lucky, and we change jobs a few times; we perhaps marry and have children, or have some other sorts of relationship; we have various ups and downs, and we die. Again being negative, the path is strewn with problems, joys, grotty things - illness, family problems – things, which bash us around. We pick ourselves up as best we can. And eventually we get decrepit, and the final time we can't pick ourselves up.

And is that it? Lots of shimmering colours, like in the holographic pictures, lots of nice bits, lots of grey and dark bits too. Is there any pattern, is there any purpose, is there a picture behind it at all? Or is it just a random, muddled sequence of events for an all too brief 80 or so years?

Religions claim it is not. Our Christian faith says that there is a pattern, a picture, which God is working out, and which He is asking us to be part of. We choose whether we want to be part of his picture or not; it's a picture He is making with our co-operation, so it's not a hard-edged pattern cutter which stamps down on us, kicking us into line. No, it's constantly shifting and adapting, to fit us in as we invite Him to use us, and our abilities, or opt out. And it's difficult to make the picture out in this life, isn't it; it's fuzzy, ill defined, seems to come and go. And as with any picture, we are often too close to it to be able to make it out. In the same way, while we are experiencing all the struggles and muddle of our lives, we often can't see any purpose, any pattern or picture: we're too close to it. And in this life God's picture is blurred, by ourselves and by other people messing it up: that's sin. In the next life there'll be no haze, no murk, no doubt, no distortion, just God's brilliantly coloured heaven, the plan fulfilled, with us part of it, if we opt in.

Today is the last day of the church's year, Today the theme is "Christ the King", the end of God's plan; next Sunday is Advent Sunday, the start of a new church year when we begin again, thinking about Jesus' first coming at Christmas, and his second coming, still to come. That's the latter part of God's plan for the world. The Bible shows the whole of God's plan, a plan which copes with people messing things up and turning their backs on Him; a plan which faces up to rebellion against God and to all sin, and enables it to be dealt with. Year by year, as we go through the church year, we remind

ourselves of this plan, which we are part of if we opt in to it. It's a plan for a better world, and also a plan for each of us because we matter to Him. Things are not bumbling along randomly and without purpose, nor are we if we have chosen to be part of his plan.

Yes, we are in a world full of dirt and pain, so the plan is incomplete. But if we are Christians we are on the winning side because nothing and no-one is bigger or more powerful than God. History is His story, and we are part of it. Let's, then, hold up our heads through all the muddle and hassle of daily living. It's His story, and we are history makers because we we are helping to make His story.

Chris van Straaten