**The Rt Revd Barry Hill, Bishop of Whitby, reflects Mark 13.1-8 for the Second Sunday before Advent, 17th November.**

Well, you can tell we're approaching Advent because the readings, a bit like the terrain, feel a little heavier underfoot, a bit more autumnal, maybe, as Jesus helps us try and make sense of a world that isn't as God made it to be, and how we live well there.

We hear of Jesus coming out of the temple in Jerusalem - and this isn't a small village church - it's not even a cathedral, York-Minster sized church, it’s double the size of the Acropolis in Athens. Or, if you measure things the way I do, it's 20 football pitches, maybe ten Riverside stadiums, large. It's huge. And one of his followers says, look at the size of these stones. And Jesus says not one will be left on top of another, all will be thrown down, something that happened a few decades later when the Romans razed the Temple in Jerusalem. That's not the kind of comment you can hear and not have questions about. Later that day, the same people come up to Jesus and they've got a few questions like, will the destruction of the temple be the end of the world? Is that the sign we’re waiting for? And Jesus says no, but he goes on to make it abundantly clear to us how hard it will be, as no doubt many of us find it, to live in between the first Advent, that we remember at Christmas, and the second Advent, the return of Jesus, a world where wars and suffering and violence will be rife, a world where things are not as God has made them to be, and we see that in our lives, and we see that in our world and our hearts, as God's heart does, breaks at that suffering and pain. So how do we live well, in that gap between the first and the second Advent?

 Just in a couple of minutes, two thoughts occurred to me; the first, I carry this pastoral staff, and as you may see, it is inlaid with Whitby jet, this geological phenomenon that's just on a few miles of coast sees black stone wash up that is somewhere around 180 million years old. And one of the reasons I find it helpful here, on the days when it feels like it's too much, like the unsolvable problem, like there's just too much pain and suffering in the world, difficulty in my own life, this stone has seen empires come and go, epochs and paradigms shift, countless worldviews, and yet, in all that time, God is God. God is on the throne.

 Context in ministry is helpful. We can't stare zoomed in, I don't think, on the pain and suffering of the world intensely the whole time. We are called as Christians not to look away from that pain, but sometimes, a bit like on my phone, if I take a photo, it offers a 0.5 zoom, it just zooms out a bit. That zooming out a bit is really important, to be reminded of the God of hope, the God that is with us, Emmanuel, God with us in all the seasons and all the challenges of life, as God has been with those that have been with us in the years past.

I've just finished reading James Cone, the American Theologian’s book, The Cross and the Lynching Tree, which I can highly recommend. And he says in there, human beings cannot live in the chaos of the world. Life is impossible, he says, without a connection with the transcendent. And when that connection is lost, existence becomes deeply hard, almost impossible. So, the first thing is zooming out perspective.

The second thing that occurs to me, and Jesus makes this really clear, I think, in our gospel, is that hard doesn't mean wrong. Life in ministry is hard for most of us a lot of the time, and that doesn't mean necessarily that we're doing it wrong. That's not to say there aren't things which make life hard that are wrong and need to be called out.

We're about to start a week of our Diocesan Safeguarding Week, and please do engage with the excellent resources and seminars and space that's provided there. There are things in our life in the dark that need to be brought into the light and dealt with. But sometimes we allow ourselves to be discipled by a world that says always, if it is hard, it is wrong. And that isn't, I think, the way of Christ.

Let me finish leaving you with our frying pan. The frying pan here, broke yesterday, and I was looking this morning to get a replacement, and, you've got a couple of choices, really, as you might know. But as Christians, we're not called to be non-stick. We're called to be like that kind of frying pan that's patinaed with layer after layer of seasoning patinaed through all of the different dishes that have cooked in it, through all the times things have been burnt, through all the flavour of life. God patinas us with hope day in, day out, if we let God. In all of the pain and all of the seasons of life, those things are not wasted and they're not lost. And most of all, as we face and look upon great suffering in the world, we are not alone. And as we'll be reminded in the coming weeks, we have hope in Jesus Christ.

May you know that hope of Christ this day. Amen.