

Reflection ... St Ronan's 15 June 2025

Texts: Romans 5:1-5, John 16:12-15

Title: Here is the News

Author: Lionel Nunns

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It's 10 o' clock, and here is The News

Reports earlier this morning of a ceasefire being reached in Gaza are now confirmed. As of midday today, local time, the IDF will begin withdrawing its forces from the whole of the Gaza strip, and at the same time all remaining Israeli hostages will be released into the hands of Red Cross/Red Crescent officials. This is a news release from the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, from the UN-sponsored peace talks that have been taking place this week in Istanbul. The agreement to cease hostilities and turn the attention now to the restoration of Gaza has been signed by both Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister, and Hamas leader, Izz al – Din al – Haddad.

In addition to the halt in attacks into Gaza, and the release of hostages, comes the announcement that Israel will take steps immediately to open all borders to full humanitarian aid. They pledge to work cooperatively to see this reliably happens. However, the greater news, perhaps, is that both sides of the conflict, together with invited international assistance, will commence planning for the restoration and rebuilding of Gaza for the future of Gaza citizens. The US-led concept of a Riviera is not included in the agreement.

Repeating this Breaking News – Israel and Hamas have just signed an agreement that will bring an immediate halt to the attacks by the IDF into Gaza, while Hamas releases all remaining hostages. More on this developing story will be brought to you throughout regular programming this morning.

To the US ... in a landmark decision made yesterday, the presidential draining of federal funds from Harvard University, and the limits placed on foreign students, has been deemed illegal by the Supreme Court, and outside the prerogative of the White House. On a difficult CNN interview late last night the President bowed to the pressure of the decision, apologised, admitting he had got it wrong.

At home, the Acting Prime Minister, David Seymour, following a whirlwind tour of key DOC reserve lands and nature sites, has just made the following press release:

From a comprehensive review of the Coalition's performance to date with respect to maintaining, and advancing, good protection of Aotearoa's natural environment and biodiversity, a Bill will be introduced to the House this week, under urgency, to stop all mining and prospecting on DOC land, to withdraw the rights of all Fossil Fuel corporates in the pursuit of offshore drilling for gas and oil, and to cancel the Regulatory Standards Bill proceeding any further.

Other News after the break ... a cat has been successfully rescued from a large tree in the Coromandel by Fire & Emergency NZ, and \$2521 has been raised by the Lumsden Playcentre for badly needed play equipment.

Stay tuned – the news continues after these messages.

You are within your rights to ask, '**What am I on?**' for this sounds like crazy stuff. What's going on here?

And you may choose to take offence at an attempt to make light of such weighty matters – please be assured, I am not trying to be cavalier with the concerns of the world, but I have reason to draw your attention to them this morning.

Now, we will not all sit in the same place politically these days, and the seriousness of global warming and the tragedy of the Gaza Strip you may be see differently from what I might say this morning – your view I respect without any judgement, for this is about hearing from God during tough times rather than trying to define what's right and what's not right, politically.

What brings me to talk this way today is an **overwhelming sense** I have these days that for many, particularly within the Christian Church, a heaviness is being lived with at the moment– a heaviness of heart and mind, and a heaviness of spirit. And it weighs just that much more than it has for a long time. Many people are worrying about the world just now.

By my reckoning, we have to go back to the nuclear threat of the 60s to find an equivalent in our lifetime. This was the era of the Cold War and the advance of Communism.

For decades since we, certainly in this land, have enjoyed relatively peaceful and settled times. What has loomed before us as threats were perhaps Think Big, a number of natural disasters, an ebb and flow of political and racial surges and of course a pandemic. For all their significance I can't recall them causing a combined malaise like today's issues seem to be doing. Right now, we seem to have a logjam of disturbing stuff going on, some of it in diminished form here in our country alongside what we observe further afield.

- I come to this conclusion through a number of means
 - The avalanche of media coverage – media of many sorts**
- **The conversations of others I'm consistently hearing**
- **Being told by my local school of the increase in anxiety in their young students**
- **Noticing the number of protests, petitions and hui taking place**
- **Watching a proliferation of legislation once brought in to protect people and planet, being jettisoned at will**
- **Acknowledging the sea change in political priorities**
- **Being aghast at the effect of misinformation and disinformation that now characterises much of political behaviour**
- **Beholding the belittling of anyone and anything outside 'the empire.'**

Without wishing to list every last issue I think that broadly speaking the convergence of these behaviours and trends are combining to trigger a current national and international concern, especially around these major matters -

1. **Global warming**
2. **Widening gap between rich and poor**
3. **A new and abrasive authoritarian rule**
4. **The treatment of migrants**
5. **A fresh arming of the nations**
6. **In Aotearoa - the attacks on Te Tiriti**
7. **The slaughter in Gaza and the crushing of Ukraine**

That's quite enough.

However, I suggest to you, that these, and other like issues have intersected to deliver us into a hope-deprived fog. I believe for many Christians, who watch values and practices in keeping with the Gospel eroded both here in Aotearoa and in other countries, a deep sadness has set in. Values long-held that play a part, for a decent society are being sacrificed on the altar of power and

greed; human worth and respect for the earth are replaced by the clamour for greater productivity, economic advancement, ethnic purity and political control. And many of us are feeling it, badly. It's like getting decency and fairness is a constant battle .. on and on; over and over.

I find it difficult to watch the 6 o' clock news now – my favourite program.

So, that's the acknowledgement of it; what's the answer?

Anglican Evangelical Canadian theologian, J I Packer, once said:

Prayer is not an attempt to force God's hand, but a humble acknowledgement of helplessness and dependence.

And in our reading from Romans 5 this morning we get the same message – **sufferings are part of life for the Christian** ... Paul writes that just as we might 'boast' about the working of God's peace, and the gift of hope in our lives through God's Grace, so we are to 'boast' in our sufferings – they're real, and they're part of being human – things not going so well is not a sign of God having left us. More than that, Paul's letter claims they are critically part of the divine design – we get better through our struggles.

Illustration – Workplace Chaplains in difficult sites – *how we learn and mature*

Our challenges and heartaches just now may well be more personal, found close to home rather than in international affairs. But we feel the same when concerned for a loved one or devastated by our own new medical diagnosis. We just want things to change and be the way they were – of course we do. Worrying about these things tends to take over our life and our thinking, and we feel down; life becomes very trying. In such times we easily go to God and do just what Mr Packer guards against – attempting to force God's hand ... and make it all better.

Let's go back to the beginning:

"It's just after 10 o' clock, and here is the News" ...

By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us – set us right with him, make us fit for him – we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that's not all:

We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we

always hoped we might stand – out in the wide open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.

There's more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling short-changed. Quite the contrary – we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit.

.... The Message Bible – Romans 5:1-5

This morning, I want our biblical text to speak into our situation with honesty, reason and divine disclosure – to inform any sense of despair that overwhelms.

Yes, we're having it rough just now, and it's getting to many of us.

But I ask the critical, and obvious question - Why should life go our way all the time?

We've had it good for a long time, but right now we are experiencing some headwinds – that's life. And for many people around the world – eg those being shot-at at a feeding station in Gaza; those living in fear of the next drone attack in Ukraine, **it's so much worse**. Bravely, we need to grasp the fact that this is the life God has ordained. So what do we do?

- Give up? No
- Get mad? No
- Rollover? No
- Become bitter? Don't think so
- Park up our Christian faith for a while? No
- Protest, march and hikoi? Yes
- Make submissions? Sure
- Speak up and Speak out? Yes
- Stand up for justice and righteousness? Yes
- Understand the trials of life as part of God's design? Yes
- Let the Holy Spirit hold us and enable us and grow us? Yes Yes Yes

... 'Here is The News - God's Good News.'

Thanks be to God.