

**“Look Teacher, what wonderful stones and buildings!”**

Us Kiwis love wonderful stones and buildings. We have often prided ourselves on one of the highest rates of home ownership in the world. Nowhere has the saying, “a person’s home is their castle” been more true than it is here.

As I look out the window of the Vicarage, the neighbours are weeding their gardens and pruning their trees. In fact, for the past 4 days, we have heard nothing else but the metallic hum of leaf blowers, pruners and small chainsaws. Kiwis love their homes and gardens.

And why not? A home is a place of refuge. A place to show your creativity and flair. A place to hold your family. A place to be yourself. A place to retreat and restore from all that the world has to throw at us. A place to rest our heads.

Everyone wants a home, a place to feel safe and secure.

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Us Kiwis love wonderful stones and buildings. But things have changed. We live in a time of staggering house prices and rises. Of celebratory real estate agents. Of government hand wringing and a genuine housing and homelessness crisis.

We now have some of the most expensive housing in the world, based on comparative analysis. Some say our housing prices have risen faster in the last 18 months than anywhere else in the world. And unfortunately, there is an ever-widening gap between those who own a home and those who don’t.

And that’s fine if you are on the winning end of that story. But what if you aren’t? What if you are a single Mum with 3 kids living in sub-standard accommodation in Otaki? Or a young couple working at good jobs who wanted to live in Ranui? Or the older person whose marriage has folded and half the family asset base isn’t enough to live on the West Coast? What if you are single?

What if all your friends have been fortunate enough to be on the winning side, and you haven’t? You can’t find the strength to be cheerful about it, to put on a brave face and soldier on, to have to negotiate yourself around the unspoken contentment, of those who are simply getting wealthier by the hour, because of luck? What if you are one of those who don’t own a home and your future has been taken away from you, largely through no fault of your own.

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As I look out at the world from my privileged position of being a property owner, living in one of the most expensive places on earth, as I see my neighbours get richer by the second, I wonder what is happening to us.

It seems to me that something is at work in the human community, and its activity is increasing day by day and week by week. Something is at work to divide us as never before.

We see the political world dissolve into hard right and left, with no compromise. We see the religious world polarised by extremists in every direction, no one listens, no one cares, all they do is kill. We see the people of the world split racially, the need for the Black Lives Matter movement, still problems over Treaty Sovereignty, and ethnic genocides all over the globe. We see the world frozen in positions on climate change, fossil fuels, the mining of coal, the heating of the earth, the destruction

of the rain forest, the killing of our oceans. We see it played out in front of us in healthcare, as different nations respond to the pandemic. We see increasingly entrenched positions on wealth and poverty. Those who have and those who don't. Those who live like we do, and those who don't. This is happening here in New Zealand, so imagine what it is like for the third of the world who live on less than \$5 a day.

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As I look out at the world, I see something malevolent at work. Something that seeks to hurt human beings and the beautiful creation God has gifted us. I don't think it matters if you subscribe to devils and demons, or greed and institutional evil, the result is still the same.

The systems of the world are not working for the majority of human beings ... or for the land and the sea, the trees, the birds, the animals, the insects and the fish.

Jesus knows this, and says so here. In the end Jesus wants for the systems that all creation lives under, to work. To be fair, just and right. That they should and care for everyone and everything ... not just the privileged few.

Jesus isn't against our Kiwi way of life, but like the rest of the gospel of Mark he warns us that following him will cost us something, everything! And it appears that investing too much of ourselves in the kiwi dream of a home is an investment in a system we need to be mindful about.

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Jesus says an end is coming ... and with that, wonderful stones and buildings ... won't matter so much.

“Not a single stone will be left in its place: every one will be thrown down.”

He says an end is coming ... when all the systems of the world will be put right ...

the trouble is we don't know when.

Amen.