

60°C on the ground in parts of Spain this week. 48°C possible in the air in parts of Southern Italy in the coming week. Creation groans with good reason. Fire and brimstone on our doorstep. It was never thus – something new and terrible confronts us and what are we as Christians to make of this? At a wedding yesterday I hesitated to pray the second prayer of blessing ‘May your children bring you happiness’ because it’s a fearful thing to have children now and yet I’m reminded of someone who once said that if he knew his life was ending tomorrow he would plant a tree. Somehow we have to have hope not only in the next world but in this world too – after all it’s through this world, in all its stubborn reality, its ability to challenge us, that God works to save us. We were promised as much when Adam and Eve were turned out of the garden – but note our hope is not in the world as such but in the God who saves us whatever the trials we face, human made or otherwise. And the third blessing may help here

*‘May the peace of Christ live always in your hearts and in your home. May you have true friends to stand by you, both in joy and in sorrow. May you be ready and willing to help and comfort all who come to you in need. And may the blessings promised to the compassionate be yours in abundance’ Amen.*

The newly-wed couple have a good track record in this respect; they met whilst working in Africa, working for people less well off than themselves – at least in material terms. And there’s the rub, because our hope in God, our hope in Christ, does not depend on our material circumstances – we are not preaching a prosperity gospel and yet part of our problem now is a result of just that – equating material progress with doing God’s will, development – better and bigger things – as a sign of God’s approbation, but what God approves, what God is, is always firstly about the spirit in which something is done

*‘May you be ready and willing to help and comfort all who come to you in need.’*

This is our marriage to God looking outwards – its meaning as planting a tree not for ourselves but for others, or preparing the soil of our hearts to receive and nourish the seeds of love forever being planted there by God, and so to the fourth blessing:

*‘May you find happiness and satisfaction in your work. May daily problems never cause you undue anxiety, nor the desire for earthly possessions dominate your lives. But may your hearts first desire be always the good things waiting for you in the life of heaven. Amen*

This is heaven now – the possibility of love now – the good things of heaven now, waiting for us to receive them – faith, hope and love received in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit or, in the words of the first blessing

*‘May almighty God, with his word of blessing, unite your hearts in the never-ending bond of pure love* —pure in the sense of no conditions attached, only the willingness to receive this love from God and to pass it on.

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