

Let's try some call and response to start. I'm going to give you a few lines and when I point to you I want you to give the response. I think at least some of you will know it, so if you do, say it nice and loudly so the others can join in.

Living is easy with eyes closed, misunderstanding all you see,

It's getting hard to be someone, but it all works out,

It doesn't matter much to me.

Let me take you down, because I'm going to

Strawberry Fields.

Nothing is real and nothing to get hung about

Strawberry Fields Forever.

Now, I am a big Beatles fan and one of the fun things about my job is that over the last few years I've got to spend a week in Liverpool. Bizarrely, I go there to talk to Norwegian prison officers about the English probation system. But, while I'm there I always have some free time, so being a Beatles fan I look for the places with some connection to the fab four. The Cavern, the Casbah club, John and Paul's childhood home. I find these places really exciting, as I think they give me some physical connection to a band that stopped making music together a decade before I was born.

This year when I was there, just a few weeks ago, I went to visit Strawberry Fields, which has only recently been opened to the public. Strawberry Field was actually the name of a Salvation Army children's home, which was set in large grounds on the leafy outskirts of Liverpool – and it was just round the corner from where John Lennon grew up. Apparently, as a boy John Lennon would bunk over the wall and enjoy himself in the gardens, finding some solace from what was quite a traumatic childhood. I was staying in the city centre and I had to take a bus to get there, and the day I went was actually what would have been John Lennon's 79th birthday – so there a real sense of pilgrimage to this trip for me.

Well, I got there and the first thing I saw was the big red iron gates. And I knew I was in the right place and I was really quite excited to be at this place

which had inspired a song I've loved listening to. But when I entered the site I found out that the big house that had had been a children's home had long since been condemned and pulled down. And the gardens that John Lennon had escaped to as a child had mostly been built over for new homes, and just a few trees and some lawn remained. It all looked very nice, but not quite what I had hoped for. Strawberry Fields was not, it seems, forever.

Of course it was another Beatle, George Harrison, who sang 'All Things Must Pass'. And maybe that's what I learnt – that places, however significant and important they may seem, just don't last forever. And I guess that's pretty easy to accept when we're talking about historical places that were never really part of our lives. But what about the places that we love and are important to us here and now – how easy is it for us to accept that they won't last for ever?

In our gospel reading today, Jesus is in the temple and he speaks about its destruction. Now, he is foretelling something that is going to happen – in 70AD the temple in Jerusalem was totally destroyed. So much so that it was difficult to say where it had ever stood.

But at the time Jesus was speaking, the temple was a magnificent sight. It was described as being covered with gold, so much gold that when the sun shone you couldn't look at it. And from a distance it was so bright that it looked like a snow capped mountain. I wonder whether the people listening to Jesus that day could ever have imagined something so breathtaking ever being destroyed. And I wonder are there places and things in our lives that we kid ourselves into thinking they will always be as they are forever?

Jesus doesn't just talk about the destruction of the temple, he also talks about the persecution of people. And this is also a very real indicator of what is to come. The temple was destroyed when the Roman Empire exerted its authority and might after a Jewish revolt, and some people estimate that over a million Jews were killed in those wars. It isn't just places that come to an end, it's also people.

Now some people read passages like this in bible and take a nihilistic view that we don't need to care about the world, or the people in it or the environment, because it's all going to end anyway. But I don't think that is the good news of the kingdom of God and I don't think that is what Jesus is telling us here.

I think part of what Jesus is telling us is – be careful what you put your trust in and be careful who you follow. You see in the years after Jesus ascended to heaven many Jews became impatient for a second coming, which they thought would restore their nationhood and bring their liberation from the Roman Empire. They proclaimed new messiahs and followed them into political conflict and wars, “nation against nation” - revolutions that led to the destruction of the temple and the slaughter of so many people. These new messiahs were the deceivers Jesus was talking about. The people who said “the time is near”, the people who said “follow me”, the people who might even have said “let’s get it done”.

Now I really don’t need to say much about the current political situation in this country. We’re in the middle of a general election campaign. And I’m not saying that Jesus is a remainer, or that he is telling us who to vote for. But I do think he is saying that we should be careful about who we choose to follow, and that when we select our leaders we should look for those people who speak and act in truth and wisdom. And that Jesus asks us to do the same.

One last thing about Strawberry Fields. I did have some disappointment when I visited Strawberry Fields. The house had gone, most of the gardens had gone, and there was a gift shop, but the fridge magnets were a bit boring. It wasn’t what I’d hoped for, but there was life there. You see, even though the children’s home had gone the Salvation Army still ran the site. And like many of their projects they have a scheme where they employ adults with learning difficulties in the visitor centre – where there’s a café, a gift shop and exhibition. The work that they are doing there is a very clear and tangible expression of God’s love in that community. Strawberry Fields may not have been forever, but in that place there is endurance of faith and God’s love, and through that there are adults who are gaining and experiencing life.

Martin Lucas