

Tuesday March 2

Luke 21:9-28 – look UP

9 When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.”

10 Then he said to them: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

11 There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

12 “But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name.

13 This will result in your being witnesses to them.

14 But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves.

15 For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

16 You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death.

17 All men will hate you because of me.

18 But not a hair of your head will perish.

19 By standing firm you will gain life.

20 “When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near.

21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city.

22 For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.

23 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people.

24 They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

25 “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.

26 Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

27 At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

The weather in these first few weeks of 2021 has been as cold and wet as usual for this time of year. At least we haven't seen much snow. But if it does snow, I'll be able to sit at my study window and watch the cars going up and down the hill, perhaps a little more slowly than they sometimes do, although the speed bumps that were applied to our road in 2013 have done little to slow some people down. But what about the cyclists, I wonder? How would they cope with the white stuff?

I remember cycling to work when I was younger and I was teaching in one of the universities in Dublin. There were occasional winters when it snowed a bit, but there was one winter when a short period of really heavy snow brought the city to a standstill for days. The university was closed for a whole week, although some staff succeeded in struggling in. In those days I didn't drive a car; I cycled the 2 miles to work in the morning, and the 2 miles home again in the evening. It really was cold that week, so the snow didn't melt for several days. Instead, cars and bikes created deep ruts in the snow, and the ruts froze hard. That made it difficult to cycle with any confidence; like others on their bikes, I tried to avoid skidding and falling off by

looking down as I went, careful to make sure I stayed in the same rut all the time. My progress was slow and wobbly! Slow and wobbly, that is, until I discovered there was a better way. Instead of looking *down*, and concentrating on my chosen rut, I looked *up* and *ahead*. Strange as it may seem, I made faster progress, and I didn't fall off.

Yesterday we looked at Psalm 37 with its advice on how not to 'get steamed up' at times like this: LOOK AHEAD, BE CONSTRUCTIVE, which we've already thought about, and LOOK UP – which is what we're thinking about now. And today's reading from Luke's Gospel chapter 21, where Jesus warns his disciples that there would be times of great stress throughout history, he says, "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Note the command 'lift up your heads': yes, a bit like cycling in the snow!

When we say the Lord's Prayer, asking God 'Your kingdom come', we're doing the same thing – we're looking up, because the one who taught us to say those words, and to 'look up' has died and been raised. Because of that, we can know that the kingdom really is on its way.