

A Whole Lotta Shakin Goin' On

SOS 24/7 Launch 2010

You can see it on U-Tube, or just simply 'Google' the words: and there he is Jerry Lee Lewis singing it like you've never seen it sung before. A wonder he and the piano don't fall apart!

Of course today we're talking a quite different sort of shaking. It's not just the piano, or the singer that's going to come apart at the seams.

It's the very universe itself.

You see that temple that looks so indestructible, so permanent?

Jesus asks.

Don't be fooled. It's all coming down. The whole lot. Not one stone will be left on top of another.

In fact it's going to end up as just one great heap of rubble.

At times you'll think that the very sky itself is falling on top of you.

Keep your head and don't panic.

It's meant to be. It's got to happen. It's going to happen.

So get ready for it.

And to get ready for it you're going to have to change the way you think,

the way you live.

You going to have to see things with different eyes.

A scientist startled me the other day. He said: I think our choices have already taken us beyond the ecological tipping point.

We've gone past the point of no return and we're going to have to learn to live with the consequences.

Only one man's opinion, true. Chilling words nevertheless.

Indisputably, there's a shaking going on. A sifting and a sorting of things, as melting ice sheets expose grounds that have been covered for thousands of years.

There is an increasing and pervading sense that there's no place to hide, that the consequences of generations of indifference and self-centredness are coming home to roost.

As we confront challenges that threaten our survival, what use, what good is prayer, you may ask?

Isn't it an excuse for inaction, an admission of helplessness — you know the last gasp expression of despair — *all I can do now is pray?*

The launch of the 24/7 SOS prayer community initiative today delivers an emphatic answer to those questions.

In the words of Jesus,

'... the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth, **for the Father searches for such as these to worship him.** ²⁴God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.'

Jesus reveals the kind of praying God is looking for ... to a woman shaken to her core — a woman with nowhere and nothing to hide. A person who for the devout, the religious of the day, was untouchable, unreachable.

A form of low life, if you will — worse than a dog.

And it is to her, this fallen woman with five men in her life that he reveals the secrets of the kingdom of God. Not even the inner circle of disciples is there for this culture and prejudice shattering revelation.

For those who stumble at the word 'inclusive' in the Charter of SOS 24/7 let them listen to those words.

That this house of prayer is open to all who come — without distinction.

The only pre-requisite — a certain attitude:

a sense of brokenness,
of openness,
of honesty;
a sense of compassion
for oneself and the world;
a feeling of solidarity with those who are shaken by the
state the world is in.

But what you say is prayer? Isn't it just passive?

Good questions.

Jesus answers — when you do pray, pray like this

‘Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven ...’

What else does it signify if not that prayer is the means by which we align what we do with what God is doing in the world?

What else does it mean if not that we are invited to create a space, to make room for God to act through us acting together with God In Jesus Christ by the intermediary of the Holy Spirit?

What else could it mean than a mysterious attunement with God’s purposes that slip streams the future into the present and hastens the coming of the new:

Isaiah saw it, probably first saw it in contemplative prayer long before he spoke the words themselves, coming from the mouth of God:

I'm creating new heavens and a new earth.

All the earlier troubles, chaos, and pain
are things of the past, to be forgotten.

Look ahead with joy.

Anticipate what I'm creating:

I will create Jerusalem as sheer joy,
create my people as pure delight.

I will take joy in Jerusalem,
take delight in my people:

No more sounds of weeping in the city,
no cries of anguish;

No more babies dying in the cradle,

or old people who don't enjoy a full lifetime

No more building a house

that some outsider takes over,
 No more planting fields
 that some enemy confiscates
I tell you ...

**Before they call out, I will answer.
 Before they've finished speaking, I will have heard.**

What else could prayer mean other than that through the very act of worship, we open our hearts to receive the pure delight of God's presence?

When God gave me this vision of a praying community in May of last year, he emphasised that the children and the young people must not be forgotten, and that they will be an integral part of this prayer movement.

Was it not an act of God that this very week, of all weeks two girls from St Claire's in Year 8 were sent to interview me about prayer. We spent almost an hour together and to mark the occasion they produced this little 'thank you' card.

'Inspiring' ... it says ...

Example: *The Gift of the Furies* ... A community indifferent to Church, suspicious ... burned by it. **And it was prayer that broke through the barriers.** And what was the production about? Anxiety about where the planet is heading.

In his book *'Arise my Love ... Mysticism for a New Era'* Father William Johnston speaks of a second spring. The expression comes from a sermon by John Henry Newman in which he saw the death of the old English church ... he laments "*That old church in its day became a corpse ... and then it did but corrupt the air where once it refreshed, and cumber the ground which once it beatified. So all*

seemed to be lost ... Babylon was great he continues and Tyre and Egypt and Nineve, and shall never be great again. The English Church, was, and was not, and the English church is once again. This is the portent, worthy of a cry. It is the coming of a Second Spring."

Newmann enthusiastically quotes Isaiah as we have done this morning, only a different part of that same vision: *"Arise Jerusalem, for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you, and His glory shall be seen upon you."*

My brothers and sisters in Christ, it has been my conviction that we are on the verge of a major revival of faith in the world, or a *second spring* as William Johnston calls it. John Paul II said of the 20th century *"The tears of this century have prepared the ground for a new springtime of the human spirit."*

The preparation for this movement of the Spirit has also been a long time in the making.

Like the 'Boiler Room' and similar prayer initiatives in the past, the building up of this community of praying people here at Holy Covenant will continue to be gradual and incremental.

Throughout 2011 at least six major 24/7 SOS events are envisaged.

They will include: vigils, special days of prayer, weekends of prayer, and whole weeks of prayer, in the monastic tradition that observes the hours of the day.

In 2012, these events will increase in amplitude to include whole months of prayer.

It is certain that the day will come when there is a visible praying community at Holy Covenant 24 hours a day.

And it is equally certain that from this praying community that identifies itself, is in solidarity with, the shakiness of the world; that glorifies God, through Jesus Christ, and earnestly intercedes for the world ...

It is certain that from that circle of prayer will emerge great projects of faith: artistic, charitable, and liturgical.

As that wise German poet Rilke has said

“Basically there are only prayers... whether one paints or mows already in the movement of tools prayerfulness unfolds”

God says to us in Jesus Christ, through the overtures of the Holy Spirit as we come to the moment of Bishop Stuart’s commissioning:

*Arise my love my dove, my beautiful one
And come away;
For now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth;
The time of singing has come,
And the voice of the turtledove
Is heard in our land. Sg 2: 10–12)*

And at the heart: Jesus’s injunction to love God with all our strength — heart mind body and soul — and to love our neighbour as ourselves beautifully expressed in the Aramaic language, Jesus’ mother tongue:

“Give birth to love for the one next door,
as you do for your own soul self
and the part of it that feels like a neighbour

Give birth to compassion for the nearest,
Yet unfamiliar, aspect of yourself
As you do for the one outside
Who feels like a stranger

Give birth for the deepest warmth for
The neighbour inside and out
As you do for your own
Subconscious community,
Inside and out.

Let compassion unfurl from your inner womb”.