Sermon for Bible Sunday (25.10.26)

- Texts: Colossians 3.12-17 and Matthew 24.30-35

If you take a tour of the Trinity College Library in Dublin, you have the chance to visit the Book of Kells Experience. The attraction's promotional material invites you to 'immerse yourself in history', and the website shows visitors walking along corridors, gazing at the huge moving images that surround them on every side.

The website tells us that we can *Embark on an extraordinary immersive voyage in The Book of Kells 360, a spectacular adventure in light and sound of the ancient masterpiece's history*. And at the end, if that's not exciting enough there is, of course, an opportunity to visit the gift shop.
Whether or not an immersive experience appeals to you, it can't be denied that *The Book of Kells* itself is absolutely fascinating.

This ancient piece of Western calligraphy and medieval art is one the most lavishly illuminated manuscripts to survive from the Middle Ages. Produced by Celtic monks around 800AD, its pages are filled with intricate detail in vivid colour – spirals, knots, birds, creatures and elaborate initials.

At its heart is the text. The four Biblical Gospels are laid out in Latin over 680 pages. Pause, just for a moment, to imagine the sheer magnitude of the task involved in producing it by hand, not to mention the effort it must have taken to procure and produce the raw materials that were needed. Inks were prepared from plants, pigments were brought from afar, before each letter was individually formed with great care and patience. It is beautiful.

All this suggests that these were not simply words to be stored away, but words believed capable of conveying truth and hope, to both present and future generations.

Today's readings are all about God's word in the bible and its implications for us. In our first reading from Colossians, Paul prays, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly' and encourages the people to give thanks to God.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says this world will come to an end, but his words will not pass away. These verses are in the middle of a lengthy discourse on the end of the world, when Christ will come again with glory and power.

It is in many ways a troubling chapter, with prophecies about fear and suffering. It tells us that all our certainties will be swept away. The old order will come tumbling down; we will fear for our safety and be judged by criteria we may not understand. We will no longer be able to depend upon anything – not even our idea of heaven. It's not an easy chapter to understand.

But in the midst of all this chaos, Jesus reassures us and says that we can depend upon him and his words.
The manuscript of *The Book of Kells* survived centuries of upheaval. Viking raids destroyed monasteries, borders shifted, political powers rose and fell. At one stage the manuscript was stolen and buried and later recovered.
Yet despite war, instability and cultural change, the words of the Gospel have continued to be copied, preserved and read.

And this has particular resonance for us on this Bible Sunday. Paul encourages the Colossians to 'let the word of Christ dwell in you richly'. And in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus speaks of upheaval and uncertainty before saying, 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.'
The Bible has been translated, copied, debated and treasured across centuries – not because it offers a way out of uncertainty, but because it sustains us at all times.

In times of calm and turbulent times, generations have heard and read about God's enduring faithfulness. Because scripture has never depended for its survival upon peace and security.

With twenty-four-hour news of disasters and wars around the world, it's tempting to think that we may indeed be witnessing the beginning of the end. But, as Jesus says in the verse that comes immediately after today's Gospel reading, 'that day and hour no one knows'.

So how are we as Christians meant to live our lives when the world seems to be an increasingly difficult place? This has been a challenge to every believer since the first Christians. St Paul again provides us with an answer when he urges the Colossians to live lives that reflect the love of God.

A love they have experienced, through receiving the words of Jesus, and allowing those words to dwell in their hearts. By doing that they learnt to be compassionate, kind, humble, meek, patient and forgiving. And at the heart of it all was love. Not the kind of love we share with family members or friends, but a love that is inspired by hope and justice for all people.

On this Bible Sunday then, we are assured by Jesus that his words will remain, whatever else is happening around us. And perhaps we are also reminded that, just as the monks who created the book of Kells knew, the bible and its words are a treasure to be cherished. A library of many different books and genres, written over several centuries, but each one helping us to recognise how God has acted in the past, so that we might recognise where he is acting in our lives, and in the world today. Let us continue to read its words, learn then, reflect on them, and be comforted by them. AMEN