

## SERMON - Epiphany 3C January 2025

Text based on Lectionary readings:

**Psalms 19.** 14 May my words and my thoughts be acceptable to you, O Lord, my refuge and my redeemer! And

**Luke 4.** 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor... 4.21 "This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read."

### **Donald Trump**

It was one of those hard to watch moments when the new president was inaugurated. A time when a new president will lay out a little of his vision for the future, set the tone for his presidency, and on behalf of the country thank the previous president for his service.

Well, there was no thanks to Joe Biden, only words of vindictiveness.

There was a vision of a country more self-centred where self-promotion and self-advancement were encouraged

And there was a tone which for many has created an uncertain, fear-filled future.

Of course it is easy for me to criticise. I am not American and I don't live there, while I know that all my friends and family and most of those I mix with are of a like mind. But we are minded that there are many who disagree and some rich and some poor see in Donald Trump a kind of saviour. Although we might wonder if the poor really are going to be the beneficiaries of Trump's presidency.

Whatever our view, we saw a leader stand up and give an idea of his vision, his manifesto if you like, and set out his stall of his mission.

### **Bishop Mariann Budde**

You may have seen the Episcopal bishop Mariann Budde preach at the inauguration service. She said, in reference to his words that God had saved him from assassination so that he could save America. (No mention of course that with that logic therefore God must have let die the man who took a bullet that day jumped over his family to protect them with no thought for himself!)

The bishop said, "You have felt the providential hand of a loving God. In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now."

Later, Trump said, "I didn't think it was a good service" and "they could do much better."

Saying this "so-called Bishop" is a "Radical Left hard line Trump hater."

"She brought her church into the World of politics in a very ungracious way. She was nasty in tone, and not compelling or smart."

Some of us may have agreed with her words, but would we have actually spoken them as she did in that context? What it did make me pause and think about, however, is the extent to which I am courageous enough to speak truth to power. Or indeed, although I hope my words are never nasty in tone, I do not believe my preaching is always compelling nor smart, but hope there are occasions there has been some seed sown over the 30 years of doing it.

The psalmist says – may the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be acceptable to you, my redeemer.

It is up to you to consider whose words or thoughts are more acceptable to God.

There is, however, the danger that we always think ours are more acceptable than others, no matter how they are spoken.

There are people who hide behind the Paul's phrase to speak the truth in love in order to be unkind or even bullying.

There are those whose words are often very encouraging, hope-filled, and kindly, and yet their actions regularly betray those laudable attributes.

## Jesus

Today's bible reading is about Jesus speaking in the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth. This is his first real public appearance when he lays out his stall, proclaims his manifesto and sets the tone of his mission. Some liked it, some didn't, and a number said: "Isn't that the joiner's boy!" "Who does he think he is, I ken his mother!"

He was a carpenter's son, who obviously did some rabbinic training. He was respected in his knowledge of Scripture if he was invited and given permission to read the scripture and expound on it in the local synagogue. A carpenter's family would not have been wealthy or even what we might call Middle Class. They were poor, but not the poorest of the poor, and Jesus came from that background.

And although we talk about poverty in our world today – of which there is much – in Jesus' day there were only the rich and the poor. No middle class whose votes all the political parties fight for nowadays.

Jesus was clearly aligning his campaign alongside the cause of the poor in his society and his choice of reading from the words of the prophet Isaiah makes this clear.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, 19to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." 20He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

But if all that had been fulfilled in their hearing, why has not yet come to pass?

Because the fulfilment of Isaiah's call for justice, is not in merely the promising of it, but in the living out of it. And Jesus fulfilled it in what he said, did, lived and died for. It clearly didn't remove all injustice, but it showed a way and proclaimed a way of life which brings its end.

His promises were fulfilled in his actions.

How often are ours?

## **You and Me**

Now we shouldn't be too hard on ourselves that the promises we make are not all fulfilled.  
That our New year Resolutions have already been broken.  
That we set out our stall and never fully achieve all that we desire.  
That our words are not always expressed in our actions.  
We are human and we fall short.

But if we don't have some guide, some goals, some aims, a direction, then we merely flounder and go with the flow.  
Or we begin to focus on what benefits or profits me and become self-seeking,  
or we simply go along with the loudest voice and let the bully get their way,  
or we think that if I were someone else, in a different, more powerful position I would do something to forward the causes of Jesus.

We can look across the world and wonder in which direction we are heading, and who has the authoritative voice and who holds the power. Then a bishop speaks the truth to power and there is a pause and we realise that we are not alone in our thinking, in our critique, and we are not alone in seeking to follow the way of Jesus who set out his stall a long time ago, and who relies on us to continue to make it come true in its hearing.

## **Holocaust Memorial Day**

Tomorrow (27 January) is Holocaust Memorial Day, and the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz concentration camp. So let me end with the words of another minister, Martin Niemoeller, who was a Lutheran minister and theologian in Germany in the 1930s. He began by supporting the Nazis but eventually realised the truth. He was imprisoned for his opposition to the Nazis. He just survived execution and after the war regretted not doing more to stand up for the victims. His words are well known ...

*"First they came for the Communists and I did not speak out –  
because I was not a Communist.  
Then they came for the Socialists and I did not speak out –  
because I was not a Socialist.  
Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out –  
because I was not a trade unionist.  
Then they came for the Jews and I did not speak out –  
because I was not a Jew.  
Then they came for me –  
and there was no one left to speak out for me."*

We may never be called to suffer what he and so many others suffered for their beliefs, but perhaps we need to know and then review what it is that we stand for, think to what extent our church is rooted in Jesus' manifesto for faith, and ask if we are ever able to proclaim, "The word has been fulfilled by my presence!"

*May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, o Lord, my redeemer. Amen.*