

## ***Bennochy church 20th November 2016***

We live in an era of failing trust. Relationships are based on trust. If we feel we cannot trust people, then relationships start to break down.

It was obvious, yet missed by the pollsters, when many 'blue collar' workers in the US voted for Donald Trump, as a vote against the political elite. The same thing happened in the European referendum. People were not just voting about Europe. It was a vote against the political establishment. People who felt left out and left behind.

The prophet Jeremiah is scathing of those who are in power. He says, "*you have not taken care of my people*". The number one responsibility of those in power.

BBC Scotland has been looking at the wealth gap in our country. The huge disparity between those who have and those who do not. The many who are priced out of the property market; the working poor who cannot afford to pay for a pension and how that gap is experienced in people's lives - the attainment gap in children's education and put quite simply, how long people live. There is a relationship between poverty and health.

This is ancient politics, long before the words 'conservative' or 'socialism' were ever coined. There is nothing new in history. There was huge inequality in the nation of ancient Israel. The great commandants of God had been ignored. Love the Lord

your God. Love your neighbour. Take care of the widow, the orphan and the stranger. What you had were vested interests of the powerful holding sway. Power ruled over justice. And Jeremiah says, that is not the way of God.

He says to those in power, and these were words they did not want to hear, the time is coming, when the Lord will choose a new King. He will be righteous, wise and just and usher in a time of peace and security. Everything that many kings of Israel had not done.

That ancient cry is the hope of many in the world today. Leaders who will govern on behalf of their people, who will have at the heart of their decisions; compassion, justice and equality. Jeremiah says that time is coming.

At this point we need to become a bit schizophrenic and live in two worlds. We have our theological world in which we rationalise the idea of Christmas as the event of the coming of this new king. Every year we celebrate the coming of the Christ child as the righteous descendant of David. We say it is done. Salvation has indeed entered the world.

We need to exit this theological bubble and see the pain of humanity that is all around us. Violence and war, abuse and addition, poverty and inequality, scandal and greed. It is all there. This is the world of reality and it is the world where the church seeks the Kingdom of God.

As Christians how do we bring these two worlds together and live lives that recognise what is going on in the world, and at the same time, offer hope in the coming of a new king. Being a religious schizophrenic is not easy.

Jeremiah was a prophet, called to bring a word of hope into a world of despair. That hope had to be based on something. Hope cannot live, cannot exist in a vacuum. His hope was a God active in the world, who had saved his people, and who would do so again. Enslaved people were made free, so a scattered people in exile can be brought home, and that history happened. But this hope sits side by side with a challenge. For ancient Israel, it was live up to the laws of God. If the church is to offer hope today, that challenge, to live lives of compassion, equality and justice does not go away.

As a church how do we recreate a sense of meaning and hope in the ancient events of Christmas. The idea of the coming of God into the world. The coming of Christ, as the new king. How does that theology, offer peace and hope to the world.

We need to begin with an understanding that Christmas is not an isolated on off event. It is based on an ancient promise given by the prophets of old. An early chapter in the same story of the salvation of God. The coming of the king, is only part of that same story, which we have so easily detached from the pain of the world, in a 'Walt Disney' like story of tinsel and glitter. Hope

does not come from Bethlehem, without Easter. Hope is not complete in new birth, without new life.

The theology of God, and his intervention in human history, that we call Christmas, has to be lived out in the world. We follow not the example of the Christ child, but Jesus of Nazareth. His actions of justice, words of peace and heart of love. Jesus of Nazareth, who lived not as the ancient kings of Israel did, but pointed the way to God.

His light that shone on Bethlehem, calls us to follow. His way, illuminated by a stable, casting the shadow of a cross upon our paths, and pointing us to God.

*"A child is born to us!*

*A son is given to us!*

*And he will be our ruler.*

*He will be called, "Wonderful Counselor,"*

*"Mighty God," "Eternal Father,"*

*"Prince of Peace."*

*<sup>7</sup> His royal power will continue to grow;*

*his kingdom will always be at peace.*

*He will rule as King David's successor,*

*basing his power on right and justice,*

*from now until the end of time.*

*The LORD Almighty is determined to do all this." (Isaiah 9: 6-7)*