

3rd of Epiphany'25

I may not be as brave as the Bishop of Washington DC, but I hope our reflection on today's Gospel won't start you texting or tweeting that the Rector's lost the plot, that he's a disgrace to the Church and should apologise for being a fellow child and pilgrim of God...

Today's Gospel is about the gift of Old Testament prophecy finding its fulfilment in the New. It must have been a very emotional moment in an unremarkable Nazareth synagogue, when everyone present, witnessed some quite remarkable oratory.

The words of Isaiah didn't just resonate that day. They came alive through the person of Jesus, to validate the kind of vocation and ministry he had already chosen. Let's try to concentrate on the original words and on their undoubted legacy and impact for us today:

“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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.”

We do have to wrestle with what is being said and how we respond. But Jesus' 'fiat' is that we do likewise – that we stop talking about great fences and barriers and walls (whether in Bethlehem today or Berlin of yesteryear) – and instead, tear them down! St Paul didn't waste any time in sharing his advice for the good people of Corinth, did he? “If one

member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.” For St Paul, it is the bottom line of what it means to be Church, and to be incorporate in the very body of Christ. Every person matters, so much so, that our limbs seem all joined up and intertwined, wherever we come from.

St Paul was steeped in the Hebrew scriptures, with the prophecy of Isaiah and understood completely why these words would have been chosen by Jesus to be his own manifesto and mark on the world and, for all times and seasons.

I just want to share two recent, personal moments of hope and light that I have witnessed and with you, reflect, that Christ’s words were never empty promises but instead, our every inspiration, hope, and pledge.

The first was on Friday in that beautiful chapel of Framlingham College. The chaplain had set up three large candles in large glass containers (like the one we used last Sunday at the Seckford tomb but these were even bigger)! They were on the central altar and each candle was lit slowly, carefully and silently. And just in that moment we were asked to pray for the three girls murdered at a dance class in Southport: Elsie, Bebe and Alice. And we were helped as one of the girls stood up and sang an ‘Aria’ from Handel. Nobody moved or fidgeted. It was one of those sublime moments when you literally felt the Holy Spirit’s presence and healing power. You felt that God was alongside all of us.

My second memory, if you like, was watching yesterday's release of Jewish captives in Gaza City. The Red Cross 4x4s' played a kind of solemn liturgical role, gently moving off in quiet procession amongst crowds with guns and flags but also people like you and me just so relieved, so 'moved' by witnessing change and hope, all mixed up together. At first I wasn't sure I was looking at a city at all but just the remains of one, the rubble and dust from great devastation – physical and emotional.

It feels like we are really witnessing and living in biblical times. We need the gifts of prophecy. But where I part company with any fundamentalist or criminal political 'powers', is that Christ's call for peace, freedom and justice are fundamental for a safer, harmonious world. Is that so different from what the Bishop of Washington said, calmly and rationally? I quote:

"I ask you to have mercy, Mr President, on those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away, and that you help those who are fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here."

IN the name of....

Amen.

