

Saturday 25th December 2021
Christmas Day (C)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Isaiah 9.2-7
NT: Titus 2.11-14
G: Luke 2.1-14

Two lines from today's readings. From our Gospel: "Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." And from our first reading from the prophet Isaiah, "Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever."

I think it is probably fair to say that Palestine 2000 years ago was not the easiest place or time to be born. It is tragic that one might say the same thing about modern Palestine. It would be wrong to suppose that back then it was a lawless and uncontrolled time, but it was a time of insecurity and fear. And that is not too far removed from our own time: when we look at the world around us, insecurity and fear is prominent. We can look at the big picture, and see the wars and the violence, the unrest and the persecution. Of course we also see the fear of COVID: less now a fear of death, but more of the disruption and the exhaustion. I see people around us as well who feel disempowered and far removed from the authorities which govern us, people who don't know how to take a share in the government of their own lives. That distance from government is the same distance felt by those caught up in war, or those living in an occupied land, as Palestine became during the lifetime of Jesus.

And using that word 'government' in connection with our own lives resonates with our reading from Isaiah this morning: "Of the increase of his government and peace there will be

no end.” There’s that word ‘government’, which to us in 21st century Britain seems to have specific meaning. But Isaiah uses the word about the promised Saviour. So let us apply the word in our context, let us think of Jesus as our Prime Minister or our President, let us think of ourselves as living in a Kingdom over which he rules. What would that Kingdom be like? How would the people live?

Well, let us just imagine what it would be like. Think of the things that are wrong with our society, think of the things you do not like. And then banish them. Let us banish war and hatred. Let us banish fear. Let us banish the inequality which leaves some people sleeping in this city in shop doorways or in hostels where they cannot trust the person next to them, but others at the same time live in comfortable luxury, with more than they can enjoy and more than they need. Let us banish everything that demeans and humbles people, everything that marginalizes or persecutes people. That would be the Kingdom of Christ, a Kingdom where, to use the words we heard in the prophet Isaiah, there is justice and righteousness.

We stumble across that sort of idealism all the time. Politicians promise us what we all know they cannot deliver: a world in which inequalities are swept away. If we speak of such a world then we speak of it as unattainable. And it is not just politics which offers a reality which seems distant. The Church of England has been witnessing to Christ in its own way since Christianity first reached these shores. The message has often been confused with its own preoccupations, and even here in Liverpool we have a murky past in support for the slave trade, the imprisonment of the penniless in the workhouse, and so many other things. Nationally, the Church today is for so many people not offering a message of hope for all, but is privatizing its preaching and continues to consolidate the institutionalization of

homophobia and misogyny. When I hear the Archbishop of Canterbury compare the response to climate emergency with the holocaust then I know that our leaders lack judgement and empathy.

But Christmas – the birth of Jesus Christ and the arrival of our God in the world – Christmas is when we can begin to think about attaining the unattainable. If you were looking for an ideal world, a world of justice and righteousness, then you might say that it is impossible. But in God – in Jesus Christ – there is peace and love pouring out unchecked into the world, and if the idealism we seek we find in God, then it ceases to be unattainable. In Jesus Christ the impossible becomes possible. If we ally ourselves with Jesus Christ and truly accept his presence not only in the world but also in our lives, then we are allowing the ideal, the perfect into our lives. We then have to ask ourselves the question of why there is still war in the world. Why is there still inequality and persecution and poverty and suffering? Well, maybe it is time that it stopped. We, the citizens of Christ's Kingdom, are where the movement to change the world must begin as we submit ourselves to the justice and righteousness which are brought by Christ. The love which Christ brings commands us to stand up whenever we see something wrong in our world; it commands us to challenge unrighteousness and injustice wherever it is found, including in the Church.

The child born in poverty 2000 years ago brought nothing into the world except the untainted simplicity of love, and it is through his love and sacrifice that we too can learn how to love. The revolution which began at the first Christmas is the revolution we celebrate today. Today is when we change the world, because today we are given the new rules by which to live, rules of justice and righteousness. Our Gospel this morning proclaimed this to us when it said, "Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to

you; he is Christ the Lord.”

Fr Crispin Pailing