

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 17th January 2021

With shock and incredulity, I have watched the horrendous events unfolding at the very heart of the government of the United States of America in Washington DC these past days. Mind you, it comes as no surprise that the 45th President of the Republic should leave office in such a shameful way – it has been the mark of the past four years since his Inauguration.

These past years, Trump has shown that he is more than willing to say any lie, ignore any standard of decency, and incite any amount of violence to shore up his power.

His unequalled cascade of lies, repeated legal transgressions, relentless disdain for ethical standards, mockery of the disabled, his boasts of sexual abuse – none seemed to matter.

I cannot get my head round the fact that 70 million American citizens still voted for him last November when we consider how his term has been marked by division, hatred and prejudice, which he has so blatantly fostered and incited, stirring up the basest elements in our human psyche, all for his glory and prestige.

I cannot fathom why many in the evangelical churches saw him as “God’s anointed”, the one who would make “America great” again, as his policies wrought havoc, creating a situation where the fuse of racial tension was lit and exploded in several states; where children of illegal immigrants were incarcerated, separated from their parents; where those on the periphery of society were mocked and derided; where so many of his aides and appointments were either fired or resigned because they didn’t agree with him. The list goes on and on.

As I watched the Capitol building being stormed by his followers as they created mayhem and destruction, leaving innocent folk dead in their path, some words from the Inaugural Address of President Abraham Lincoln in 1865 ran through my head.

“With malice toward none, with charity for all...let us strive to bind up the nation’s wounds....to do all we may achieve, and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

The marks of a true patriot, a real statesman.

I am confident that as President Elect, Joe Biden, takes occupancy of the Oval Office, we shall witness the start of a very different era in American politics, and pray God, a country that can be once again respected as a promoter of true democracy in our world. Joe Biden has a gargantuan task ahead of him. He will have mountains to climb to try to rid the USA of the bitter legacy which Donald Trump has left in his wake. It is the prayer of millions, that this once great country will again be “One nation, under God.”

As one American Minister preached from his pulpit on the Sunday following the rioting, “We must repent for making the person who occupies the White House more important than the One who occupies our hearts.”

The hopes and dreams of a new start.

After Jesus’ baptism in the River Jordan, he returned to Galilee, ready to begin His mission. The start of His earthly ministry.

And as He does so, He began to preach.

“Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand” He says.

This was Jesus’ inaugural address, the formal start of His public ministry, the point at which He announced why He had come.

“Repent” He cries. “Turn away from your old way of living. God wants you to live in love and mercy and forgiveness and compassion and peace. No more fighting; no more greed; no more animosity; no more hatred; no more darkness. The Kingdom of heaven is here! The time has come to remake our nation!”

Strong words, really strong words.

The Messiah had arrived and He is Jesus, and here is His plan, clear and plain as the day.

God is delivering and saving and liberating His people, starting here, starting now.

A new day has dawned, a new regime is being ushered in with the ministry of Jesus.

But there is no great ceremony, no “Hail to the Chief”, no inaugural balls.

What did Jesus do?

Two fishermen were working at their trade. They heard a man’s voice, “Follow Me!”. And the text says, “immediately”, they dropped their nets and followed.

Now, I am really interested in that word “immediately”, because I am not an “immediately” person.

I am a procrastinator.

I pray often to be forgiven for “those things left undone” that I was going to get around to doing.

And twice in this story, there is a sense of urgency – immediately Peter and Andrew leave their nets.

And then it happened again – immediately, Jesus called to two other fishermen in their father’s boat : “Follow Me!” and off they went.

The first four of Jesus’ disciples – Peter and Andrew and James and John.

They followed Jesus and they changed the course of human history.

That appears a very strange way to begin a revolution. To call four fishermen – not by creating a powerful army, not by appointing powerful envoys, but by choosing a group of untrained fishermen.

The greatest leaders who have come to us through history have been quick to point to those around them for their individual successes – to their spouses, their mentors, their advisers, their co-workers – who offered support and encouragement and loved in order for them to do what they had to do.

And that is exactly what Jesus did.

He told those first four disciples that they were now going to fish for people.

They were to take on the mantle of His work, as well as the gift of His love and wherever they went, they were to be agents and instruments of God's justice and goodness.

That same task is for you and me who are His followers today - Jesus calls us to participate in His great work of lifting our world nearer to God.

It is truly amazing how Jesus takes people like you and me and does Kingdom work – visiting the sick, comforting the sad, feeding the hungry, teaching folk of all ages, breaking down barriers and building bridges of understanding and compassion.

And that work is even more essential in our bleeding world today!

Not just admiring Jesus; not just saying fine things about Him, but carrying out His ministry.

“Come,” says Jesus “Follow Me!”

And it is my earnest prayer that our friends on the other side of the pond may, in this new Presidency, find afresh a true religion, not one that bends so easily to the power of a power crazy individual.

The Revd Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister.