

Evensong – Epiphany 3 2018

Go tell the earth to shake
And tell the thunder
To wake the sky
And tear the clouds apart
Tell my people to come out
And wonder
Where the old world is gone
For a new world is born
And all my people
Shall be one

Part of the Poem 'Earthquake ,' by the American monk, theologian and mystic, Thomas Merton, whose accidental death in 1968 robbed the world of someone whose vision was that of the unity of humanity – a unity capable of being brought about through the Divine Love of God, revealed to us within our humanity in the face of Jesus Christ.

A poem about an earthquake seemed to me to be a good choice for this season when we are in the midst of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. I seem to remember saying something about this rather forgotten initiative in previous years. Perhaps it will seem to have a greater impact in towns or cities where there are more than one or two churches, or where theological difference means that unity is not possible from one group to another. This is a scandal for the Church, but, I guess affects not only Christianity, but also other religions (Sunni and Shite Muslims, Orthodox and Progressive Judaism, Ultra-nationalist or regular Hinduism), as well as what we call the Secular world, particularly in political terms.

This general division within humanity is why I do think that it is **so** important for Christians to have a united voice within the world. The purpose of the Church is not one to provide a pale form of social care (although spiritual care is at its heart), nor called to be all things to all people - because this is no message at all. The Church is called to proclaim that no matter *who* or *what* we consider ourselves to be, that, in the words of the Letter to Titus, *'the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all.'* In doing so, we are saying that we are called to live lives which demonstrate the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ - and this is transformational for the world.

You might think that I am homing in on unity to avoid studying that rather difficult passage from Titus in greater detail. There is some truth to that, and the compilers of the Lectionary were obviously treading even more warily in leaving out two verses about the way in which slaves should behave! It's as well to remember that most theologians agree that this letter to Titus is much later than those we believe to have come from Paul's actual pen. It was common at that time for people to write in the name of revered teachers, and it seems to be almost certain that this is that case in the Letter to Titus.

Where does this leave us regarding interpreting what the letter says? Well, I don't believe that the letter to Titus is any less relevant to the modern Christian, as long as we view it through the hermeneutic of the Gospel message in the light of 2,000 years of Christian history. The Good News of Jesus Christ is the heart of who we are, and if we take scripture out of context, or try to hang everything on a verse or two, then that is when things begin to go wrong. Without prejudging the issue, there certainly seems to be the whiff of this in the terrible and tragic actions of David and Louise Turpin towards their 13 children in California.

I have recently read *Evangelii Gaudium* – the Joy of the Gospel – an Apostolic Exhortation on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world, from the pen of Pope Francis. He seeks to remind all Christians of our call to make known the transformational life which is open to all people through Jesus Christ. Francis gives example after example of the way in which individuals may use their God-given talents, or charisms – gifts from the Holy Spirit – in which to draw others into knowing transformation through Christ.

As he says, the credibility of the Christian message is much greater if there is a genuine commitment to ecumenism within the Church. This does not mean a bland uniformity, but the openness to support one another, no matter the length of our rosary or of our sermons, or the use of Tudor liturgy or the lack of liturgy altogether! Our unity is revealed in Faith, Hope and Love, and our ability to live and reveal the Grace of God, present within our lives - the Good News of Jesus Christ which we are called to both live and share.

So tell the earth to shake
With marching feet
Of messengers of peace.
Proclaim my law of love
To every nation
Every race.
For the old wrongs are over
The old days are gone
A new world is rising
where my people shall be one.

And say
The old wrongs are over
The old ways are done
There shall be no more hate
And no more war
My people shall be one.

For the old world is ended
The old sky is torn Apart.
A new day is born
They hate no more
They do not go to war
My people shall be one

So tell the earth to shake
With marching feet
Of messengers of peace
Proclaim my law of love
To every nation
Every race.

There shall be no more hate
And no more oppression
The old wrongs are done
My people shall be one.

May this be our will as it is God's. Amen

Jeremiah 3: 21– 4: 2

3 ²¹ A voice on the bare heights is heard, the plaintive weeping of Israel's children, because they have perverted their way, they have forgotten the Lord their God:

²² Return, O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness.

'Here we come to you; for you are the Lord our God.

²³ Truly the hills are a delusion, the orgies on the mountains.

Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.

²⁴ 'But from our youth the shameful thing has devoured all for which our ancestors had laboured, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. ²⁵ Let us lie down in our shame, and let our dishonour cover us; for we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our ancestors, from our youth even to this day; and we have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God.'

4 If you return, O Israel, says the Lord,

if you return to me, if you remove your abominations from my presence, and do not waver,² and if you swear, 'As the Lord lives!'

in truth, in justice, and in uprightness, then nations shall be blessed by him, and by him they shall boast.

Titus 2: 1-8, 11-14

2 But as for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine. ² Tell the older men to be temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance.

³ Likewise, tell the older women to be reverent in behaviour, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, ⁴ so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵ to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited.

⁶ Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. ⁷ Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, ⁸ and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us.

⁹ *Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to answer back, ¹⁰ not to pilfer, but to show complete and perfect fidelity, so that in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Saviour.*

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, ¹² training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

¹⁴ He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.