

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 12. 12-14, 20-31

Luke 4. 14-21

This week a fool for Christ stood before the new king and proclaimed the Good News of the kingdom of God. And people listened. Indeed, people had to listen.

We are in a moment in history when people are listening because with the re-election of Donald Trump as president for the second time, of the nation that promoted itself to the world as the light on the hill, has now become the inferno on the hill and in a state of self-immolation. I thought that the US was a democracy but it seems that it is a kind of absolute monarchy. In the past days there have been a vast array of executive orders passed and laws of former presidents and governments repealed; at the stroke of a pen, accompanied by great fanfare and a display of breathtaking smugness. And the ability of the president to grant pardons was I thought the privilege only of absolute monarchs; but it seems not to be the case. Royal largesse. And the new king has arrayed around himself children and their spouses and other hangers-on to do his bidding and for their pockets to be lined. The children being what the younger generation call nepo-babies; that is children who are shoe-horned into positions of power, influence and prestige by their powerful elders. Nepotism.

But what we saw on Tuesday in the National Cathedral in Washington DC, US time, was what was supposed to be a routine and rather innocuous service of prayer for the new president. But the line between church and state was clearly drawn by The Right Reverend Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde as she preached the gospel in unequivocal terms. In her carefully chosen and quietly spoken words, the church did not resile from its commitment to the gospel. I heard indeed were an echo of the words of Jesus in the sermon on the mount:

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The president called her nasty.

The political and social and corporate elite of the US entered the church's ritual space – a ritual space sets aside for the hearing of the gospel – a space in which all human clamouring ceases in order that we might, might just possibly, hear the voice of God. This was proclamation, declaration, acclamation of the Gospel; it was not the kind of clamouring we have become accustomed to in the media, whether print, TV or digital and the deluge of opinions which arupt like some kind of contagion. It was the gospel, pure simple, unadorned and not veiled, but spoken with clarity and humility.

Let me make one final plea, Mr President. Millions have put their trust in you. As you told the nation yesterday, you have felt the providential hand of a loving God. In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now. There are transgender children in Democratic, Republican and independent families who fear for their lives.

And the people who pick our crops and clean our office buildings; who labor in our poultry farms and meat-packing plants; who wash the dishes after we eat in restaurants and work the night shift in hospitals – they may not be citizens or have the proper documentation, but the vast majority of immigrants are not criminals. They pay taxes, and are good neighbours. They are faithful members of our churches, mosques and synagogues, gurdwara, and temples.

Have mercy, Mr President, on those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away. Help those who are fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here. Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were once strangers in this land.

It was the gospel as it is addressed to each of us as persons made in the image of God; the divine call within each of us by The Mercy which is the divine seed within each.

When Jesus comes to his home town synagogue, and he comes to read from the scroll of the book of the prophet Isaiah he reads: the spirit of the Lord is upon me ...

He has recently emerged from the wilderness and the testing with the echo of God's voice still in his ears: *You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.* What Robin Whitaker and Sean Winter said about Jesus' declaration at the conclusion of his reading - Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing – is that he is not saying I am the fulfilment of this prophecy but that I am placing myself in this story of Isaiah, this vision of Isaiah for the declaration of good news, for liberation and healing. Today, I am making this story mine.

This is what each of us are called to when Jesus bids us to follow; to live inside the story of God's liberation and healing, of grace and mercy. It is the call to all of us, whether cleaner or president.

When the church deceives itself that God is in a lather about someone else's morality then we deflect and dissemble the power of the gospel to call us collectively to live lives of mercy and kindness. The gospel is a call to us together to embody a new creation.

The gyrations which were unleashed on Monday of this week half way around the world are a mighty distraction and are a temptation to despair, to withdrawal, outrage or disgust – an easy diversion from the inequities and inequalities closer to home: the failure of mercy to have the day in the referendum about the voice; the growing inequality of incomes in our country, the appalling state of housing, education, the demonisation of particular sectors of the community for political mileage, the lurking racism, not far under the surface, the treatment of national and international corporations like some kind of national charities, to which are handed billions in subsidies.

Australians all, let us rejoice? I struggle to sing it with a full heart.

The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the Lord are sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;

More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;

The law the psalmist sings of is not law-and-order law, rather lore L-O-R-E which delights the heart because it is the way of wisdom and grace and lovingkindness – it revives the soul. This is not carrot and stick law, or sending a message law but the rule of grace at the heart of all that is.

What Bishop Edgar Budde did this week was remind the church of who we are called to be and the power of the Word which we are called to proclaim – and that this Word maybe is even more powerful when spoken with quietness and humility. So, may we not lose heart; may we find our own voice and may the spirit grant us grace as we seek to be messengers of the good news.

Andrew Boyle