

Proper 22, Trinity 16, Year A. S Modwen's

Isaiah 5: 1-7
Psalm 80: 7-15
Philippians 3: 4b-14
Matthew 21: 33-46

Here is the prophet doing what prophets *should* do: speaking unpalatable truths. Here is Jesus doing what Jesus so often does: speaking unpalatable truths.

The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.

You heard a harvest sermon last week. Today's is a different harvest sermon. The Lord provides the means for the vineyard to grow good grapes. But it's a bad harvest of wild grapes and so the vineyard is destroyed.

The Lord provides the ingredients for the Kingdom of God. How do you respond? The Lord gives life. How do you respond? It's up to you.

How do you respond when someone offers you a gift? A gift is only a gift if you accept it as a gift. You have to stretch out *your* hands to take what is on offer. You have to *respond*. You have to *act*. Refusing to accept, refusing to act, amounts to rejecting what's on offer. We throw the gift back in the donor's face. We exclude ourselves from the generosity. Jesus talks about people being excluded from the Kingdom. The Lord does not exclude us, but by our standoffishness and refusal to dance to his invitation, we exclude ourselves.

I've been here three months now. A quarter of a year. I was appointed to stir things up at S Modwen's in order to provoke growth. I'm wondering how best we can thrive in the next decade or two. How can we best serve the town?

Let us imagine that Our Lord comes to S Modwen's. What does he find?

- He finds that a church built in his honour is locked most of the time.
- If he comes at a time when the building happens to be open might see people who in world terms are reasonably well off. He might wonder how they serve the people of the town who are less well off.
- He might notice that the building is a temple to the past.
- If he comes to a PCC meeting, he would hear that most of the energy and interest is with money, and with keeping the building looking as it did in the past.
- He might wonder why all decisions are made by older people for a future that few of them will see.

Let us imagine that Our Lord now looks around Burton.

- He might see a lot of people sitting alone watching a flickering box in the corner of the room.
- He might see people at night around the church injecting fluid into their veins.
- He might see men and women hitting each other.
- He might see children being hit, and still going to school the next day.
- He might see young people's bodies being exploited for the sexual gratification of those who should know better.
- He might see people knocking on Vicarage doors for food and drink, and sleeping outside in boxes.

Our Lord might look at all this, and look at us here in this building, and think, 'ah, they come for spiritual refreshment so that they can go out into the world and be my ears, my eyes, my hands, my feet, and my mouth, to heal the sick, to free the captives, to tend the poor, to bind the lame, and to restore creation.'

Or would he? I hope he would not hear moaning and criticism and Chinese whispers. I hope he would not think that we come here simply to keep ourselves happy in the prisons that we have made for ourselves, 'inclosed in our own fat'. I hope he would not think that our coming to this church for an hour or so once a week was just a hobby like going to the gym, the golf club or the sewing circle.

We have some serious thinking to do about the future. At this time of year we know well enough that the harvest is plentiful only if the ground has been disturbed and seeds have been planted. Leaving things as they are means that soil becomes more and more stale, with the inevitability of death. My job is to disturb you.

I would like to set up a *Survive and Thrive* group to get going with planning. Not another group that talks, drinks tea, and complains about the Vicar, but a group that gives serious consideration to what this church and church community must do, and how to do it. If you wish to serve on this group, write your

name on the sheet at the back of church. I hope that someone might offer to convene this group—it needs to be run by someone other than me. Vicars come and go (and anyway I have three churches to care for), and initiatives and planning for the future have to come from you rather than be imposed by me.

Robin and I are embarking on trips to other town churches nearby to see how they do things. Stoke, Wolverhampton and Birmingham are fixed, and we may go to Tamworth and Derby too. If any of you would like to join us, see me afterwards.

We have been given all these 'talents'. What shall we do with them? Will we squander them on squabbles about forms of service, versions of the Bible, and choice of hymn tunes? These squabbles have to stop—I will take no notice of them. Or shall we pull together to establish a more secure place for this church in Burton life?

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Please stand. Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

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