

8th January, 2017

Reading: Isaiah 42: 1 - 9

Sermon: Real Power

The theme which has been suggested on the Church's website for this second Sunday of the year is power.

When we look at nature, we see the power of wind and water to destroy all that we create. Rivers burst their banks and wash away homes and livelihoods. We saw that in our country at the end of last year.

Tsunamis can cause utter destruction, destroying whole communities in their wake. Hurricanes, and even gales force winds, also have the power to destroy homes and lives.

But there is also a gentler side to nature. There are the slow moving glaciers which equally have the power to destroy, to rip mountains apart as they carve out a path for themselves in the landscape, and yet they move so slowly that for centuries, the beauty they are creating is unseen. We cannot argue with the fact that they have created some of the most stunning scenery in the western world.

Power, the power of nature, has the capacity for good and evil.

Nature just draws me in and I could talk about stunning scenery all day long but the theme is power and not nature so we need to move on and indeed to a subject which I can't stand, namely politics. I raise it because where else is power or the desire for power more clearly demonstrated than in the world of politics.

It's not politics as such that I hate It's more politicians and the way

that they speak to and about each other. We saw that so clearly in the run up to the American elections. We have seen it in our own country. Condemnation of others, of what they think and of what they represent, is commonplace. If one says black, the other will say white because they belong to different parties. They couldn't possibly be seen to think the same things. If one has a similar policy to another, they have stolen that idea from the other.

Few, if any, ever point out the good in what others are doing or in what they stand for because to do so would almost seem like a betrayal of their own party. What we do see is that those who shout the loudest are on our TVs day in, day out. Those who work away quietly in the background, we rarely hear about.

Call me a cynic, if you like, but at the end of the day, all the name calling, all the criticism, all the agro is all about the desire for power. That is the one thing which is on everyone's agenda and in politics, it doesn't matter who goes under in the attempt to reach the top, as long as you reach the top. There are similar issues in big business.

The bruised reed gets stabbed in the back. The one who is struggling gets snuffed out. Support and encouragement for colleagues seems to be lacking in that world, in that world which claims to seek to bring justice, which claims to seek to meet the needs of the rich and the poor, which claims to have our best interests at heart. There is no room for a weak link in politics or in big business.

The job security of the politician is as volatile as that of a football manager. Get it right and you are praised. Get it wrong and you are out on

your ear and what will be remembered? Not the good you have done but the mistakes you have made.

Those comments are general in their nature. They are about no one political party and no one politician. There is good work done by people in every party and there are mistakes made by people in every party. What saddens me is the inability of politicians of every party to work together for the good of all. The point I am trying to make is that power which has the potential to do good can also be so destructive.

In our scripture reading for today, the idea of what it is to be powerful is turned on its head. What we see from the One who holds ultimate power, the Creator of the earth, the giver of breath and the sustainer of life, is compassion.

His servant, our Lord, is described as the One who will establish justice on earth, but He will do so with compassion. **He will not shout or cry out, or raise His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smouldering wick He will not snuff out. In faithfulness. He will bring forth justice.**

Do you know the one thing which struck me as I read this. God is not on a quest for power. He already has the power which so many others seek. He has no need to throw His weight around. He has no need to fight His corner because He has already won, not that there was ever any competition in His eyes.

The question is, do we trust Him? Do we feel confident enough to turn to Him and to depend on Him when we are that bruised reed or that smouldering wick? Do we realise that He is a compassionate God, who

reaches out to us through our Lord, to heal us and to minister to us, to hold us in His arms and to strengthen us. He reaches out to release us from darkness and from captivity.

Prison walls take on many different forms. Back in the 80s Pink Floyd wrote a song called Another Brick in the Wall. They spoke about dark sarcasm being another brick in the wall behind which kids would hide but there are many bricks we add to the wall.

There is low self esteem. We tell ourselves that we are good at nothing and so try nothing because we believe we will fail. But that's just a brick that has been created by the messages others have given us throughout our lives.

There are so many bricks: guilt, jealousy, insecurity, fear, fear of getting hurt, fear of failure, fear of life and even gossip which can destroy us. Spreading gossip is in its own way a power trip because it is a way of telling someone that you know something they don't which gives you the advantage. The list of bricks is endless.

I came across a story about gossip as I was preparing this. In ancient Greece, Socrates was reputed to hold knowledge in high esteem. One day an acquaintance met the great philosopher and said:

Do you know what I just heard about your friend?

Socrates replied: Hold on a minute. Before you tell me about my friend, it might be a good idea to take a moment to filter what what you're going to say. Let's do a triple filter test. The first filter is Truth... Are you absolutely sure that what you are about to tell me is true?

The philosopher replied: Well no, actually, I just heard about it....

All right, said Socrates. So you don't really know if it's true or not. Now, let's apply the second filter, the filter of goodness. Is what you are about to tell me about my friend good.

Well no, said the philosopher.

So you want to tell me something bad about my friend and you're not certain it's true. You may still pass the test though... if you pass the last filter. Let's apply the filter of usefulness. Is what you want to tell me about my friend going to be useful to me?

The philosopher shrugs and says: No, not really.

Well, says Socrates, if what you want to tell me is neither true, nor good, nor even useful, why tell it to me at all?

That is a very gentle way of stopping gossip and of preventing the harm it can do. It is something we can all practice and it will make a difference because it reflects compassion.

I then saw another story in which the question was posed? What do you think 2017 will bring?

Flowers, was the reply.

How come?

Because I am planting flowers.

We came step into 2017 wielding a hammer and set on destroying all in our wake or we can plant flowers. We can perform acts of random kindness. We can stop gossiping. We can look for the good in each other and in others. We can work together for the good of our Church and our community. We can stop the power struggles. They exist but they are destructive.

We need to mirror the compassion of our God which will always come out on top and which will help us to establish justice on earth and more particularly, in our small corner of the earth.

We can only do that with the help of our Lord and Saviour who comes to us and who reaches out to us even when we are bruised and feel as if the light has all but gone out of our lives. **He will not shout or cry out or raise His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smouldering wick He will not snuff out.**

That is power in its purest form and that is the power which will help us win through.