

- How good are you at speaking the truth? I don't really mean whether you are honest at owning up when you know you have made a mistake. I sort of hope that, although it's not easy, all of us will strive to do that anyway. I mean something slightly more subtle.
- I'm more interested in asking the question, "How good are you at identifying where Christian truths are at odds with prevalent views of society? And how good are you at putting the Christian truth across in this situation?"
- The worryingly aggressive actions of Vladimir Putin in Ukraine are a case in point. What Christian truths can we employ to point to a way ahead?
- It thankfully seems that virtually everybody is keen to avoid armed engagement of outside nations in Ukraine. The threat of a nuclear bloodbath is just too great and it would surely just lead to greater suffering for the Ukrainian people if we did. On the other hand there is no clear consensus about the level of sanctions that Europe and the United States should employ and they are likely to be less effective as a result. This is largely because sanctions hurt not just the nation they are aimed at but also the nations inflicting them and from a votes point of view, economic wounds are almost more painful than physical ones. But without sanctions is there any prospect of justice for the Ukrainian people? Let alone the Russian proletariat?
  - Or should we just do nothing and let greater peace, in the sense of absence of war, predominate, and sacrifice any form of justice, for safety? Is Christian peace just the absence of fighting?
  - What do you think is the Christian perspective here? What are you prepared to sacrifice for the justice of others? And are you prepared to say so in a possibly unpopular setting?
- I think Christians need to be heard. Today, more than ever! And especially in these difficult sort of grey areas.
- How good are you at speaking the truth? Because truth is very different from hope!
- The hope of Jews 2 000 years ago was that the Romans would be defeated, Israel would be vindicated by God and life would be easier and freer. Was that the truth of what actually happened?
- It was against this backdrop that Jesus went up the mountain with Peter, James and John and the extraordinary events of the transfiguration took place. Prayer; dazzling white clothes; a shining face; Moses and Elijah; a mysterious frightening cloud; The voice of God, *'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'*; ... and then silence. This transfiguration of Jesus was a manifestation of the presence of God in the truth of life 2 000 years ago.
  - The presence of Moses in the scene is a reminder that, 1 200 years earlier, God had performed the most remarkable act of setting free in Jewish history, as he gave them the Passover, and the Jews were released from slavery in Egypt and set on to way to freedom in the Promised Land
- The hope of the Jews was that God would do it again, the Romans would be turfed out and Israel would once again become a free nation. However the truth was that they were in the final days before the temple would be destroyed, the Romans would flatten Jerusalem, life would become intolerable, ... , and Jesus would be crucified.
- The Christian truth here is that crucifixion would open the door for resurrection and new beginnings in a totally unexpected direction. And that's the new Exodus, the freedom, that Jesus offers.
- I think it's meaningful that this wonderful occasion of transfiguration is immediately followed by an ugly little scene of failure. Were you listening at the end of the Gospel reading to hear what happened next?
- They came back down to earth with a bump as they descended from the mountain. Immediately the next scene is a great crowd, an epileptic boy in the midst of a severe seizure, and the complete inability of the disciples to do anything about it. Imagine, the noise and the chaos, and the frustrated embarrassment of the disciples.
  - Are the faces of Peter, James and John shining with the reflected glory of what they had witnessed up the mountain? Do they make any impact on the situation? It would seem not. It takes a rather grumpy Jesus to sort it out. Life in all its grit and inequality has swept over them immediately once again. Did the transfiguration make any difference to them at all?
  - Their hope was they could heal the boy and all would be happy. The truth was somewhat different.

- There is a sense that they are stuck with the crucifixion without the benefit of the resurrection yet. They need to saving work of Jesus to take effect for that.
- Is that where we are with Ukraine? Crucifixion without resurrection? Is that where we are with climate change? Is that where you are with whatever the challenging events of the grit of daily life are throwing at you? A bit like the Israelites lost and frustrated in the desert, before they reach the freedom of the Promised Land?
- What do the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit do to change all this? Where is the Christian Good News in all these situations?
  - For an answer, look at the difference in tone between the Gospel reading, before death and resurrection, and the first reading, part of the letter from Paul to the Corinthians which of course was written some years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- Here are some phrases from each to compare:
  - From the Gospel, *'I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.'* From Corinthians, *'all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror.'*
  - From the Gospel, *'the disciples kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.'* From Corinthians, *'we act with great boldness.'*
  - From the Gospel, *'You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you?'* From Corinthians, *'by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.'*
- Do you feel the difference in tone between the two. Do you notice in Corinthians, the greater openness, the greater, courage, the greater honesty and realism, the greater reliance on death and resurrection to let God's Spirit lead us in new creative directions, speaking truth? *'Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.'*
- And we have the same Spirit with us today. How can we recognize the hope the world has and speak to it Christian truths that give a possibility of new beginnings in worrying and dangerous times?
- It seems to me, as I've already said that the hope of most of us is that the Russians will leave Ukraine without a global bloodbath and without us having to put painful sanctions in place.
- The Christian truth seems to be that justice and peace are important. We want them in the correct order. Which would you rank them in? Justice first and peace second? Or peace first and Justice second?
  - And surely the justice we want is justice for the most vulnerable people of Ukraine. And if we are to keep peace, that is going to be very expensive for us.
- The Pope has suggested that Christians worldwide should keep Ash Wednesday as a day when we highlight this in prayer and a desire to allow truth to be spoken. Will you join me in that? I warmly encourage you to come to one of our Ash Wednesday services if you possibly can when we will highlight the mess of the world in ash on our foreheads and pray for justice and peace in Ukraine and our willingness to be part of that.
- The other great Leviathan of danger today is climate change. I guess the hope of society is that it will be thwarted by other people making sacrifices so that we can continue the pleasant lifestyle to which we have become accustomed.
- My view is that the truth is likely to be rather different and that it will affect our lives in drastic and uncomfortable ways, but that Christ offer us a way through which gives direction and hope for the future.
  - That's what our mission this summer is all about. The Christian response to climate change and the Christian hope for the future. Life will not be the same. But there will be a future. If you look at the Lent leaflets out today, you'll discover how we hope to tackle this, and we begin next week as we think about how we as Christian can speak truth about God's impact on our lives today.
- All that is, I believe, speaking with the light of the transfiguration visible. Bringing the glory of Christ into the mess of everyday life.
- Will you join with me this Lent in striving to speak the truth to a world whose hopes are so very different from the hope which Jesus offers?