

A sermon preached by the Revd Martin Tanner on Advent 2, Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2016 in St Mary's Church, Market Drayton at 10.30am

"Can we know truth?" Bible Readings: Romans 15v4-15 Matthew 3v1-12

### **"Preaching" "Saying" "Warning" "A Voice"**

Using these words so close together in chapter 3, St Matthew makes it **abundantly clear** that John the Baptist was trying to communicate to the people of his day.

His job was to prepare the way for Jesus and he did so **with WORDS**. And then he offered baptism as a symbol to emphasize the reality and truth of the words he spoke.

**The WHOLE POINT of words is TO COMMUNICATE.** To get through.

- To help people to know and understand.
- To dispel ignorance.
- To share knowledge and wisdom and insight.

And, of course, JB communicated non-verbally as well. Distinctive dress: coat of camels hair; distinctive hair: never cut; distinctive diet: locusts and wild honey; distinctive address: the wilderness!

**By whatever means, the whole point of communication is TO BLESS other people.**

- So other people are the better for knowing.
- So other people are the better for understanding.
- So other people are the wiser.
- So other people can live better.

Therefore, words are special, words are important, words are powerful. **Words OUGHT to be revered** and savoured because they have great power to move our lives forward.

But the problem today is that **we are SWAMPED with words**. Email, mobile phones, texting, social media, blogs, 24 hour TV news, have all increased the number of words that come our way enormously in the last 20 years.

Many more than 20 years ago Harry Nilsson sang what is even more true today:

*Everybody's talking at me, Can't hear a word they're saying, Only the echoes of my mind.*

If everybody is talking, if the noise of so many words blocks out the ability to hear, then none of us can listen, none of us can learn new truth because we can't hear a word that's being said!

(2)

We are drowning in words and all that is left is the echo of our minds. Communication is no longer happening.

**It is all rather depressing, is it not?**

**So what do we have to do?**

We have to make SPACE, away from other words and noise, for SPECIAL WORDS.

Space for God and for truth to communicate to us. **Which is why the old name for daily devotions is a good name: THE QUIET TIME**

A time away from other noises, a time of quiet for God to speak through the Scriptures.

As Christians living in a digital, always on, 24/7 culture **we have to learn TO MAKE SPACE for God** and for his truth to shape our lives.

***But, Can we know truth?***

The answer is, simply: YES.

Jesus claims to be The Truth. And the Scriptures speak of him.

What we have heard read today could not have been invention or dreamt. The story of John the Baptist has an authentic ring. And there were many eye-witnesses.

**The Bible is a reliable guide.**

God is NOT in the business of hiding himself and being un-knowable. The official Anglican view in Article 6 of the 39 Articles is that the Bible contains ALL THINGS NECESSARY for our salvation. The Bible doesn't tell us *everything*. But it tells us enough and it tells it truthfully, reliably.

**The bigger question today is: WILL WE FOLLOW TRUTH?**

WILL WE LET THE EVIDENCE INFLUENCE OUR DECISIONS?

**And the answer from the USA seems to be "NO"!**

*Would you elect as a reliable, trustworthy, President someone who is thrice-married, insults women, Muslims, war heroes, Mexicans, the disabled and other minority groups and makes wild statements that often offend, appears to act as a bully, prefers to build walls rather than bridges and has NEVER held political office?*

(3)

**One would *THINK* that the evidence in favour of Donald Trump being electable is weak.** But, as we all know, he WAS elected.

Objective facts were less influential in shaping public opinion than emotional appeals. And so a new word has been coined by the Oxford Dictionary: **We now live in a POST-TRUTH world.**

- A world where truth is no longer paramount and supreme.
- A world where feelings are more influential.
- Where important decisions may not be based on facts.

**It is a scary world!**

But not, on reflection, a surprising world. This has been coming.

A "Me-focused" society, a "Feelings-focused" society, will NEVER be that keen on facts and evidence and truth and authority because they are inconvenient and get in the way of me doing my own thing.

A "Me-focused" society will, therefore, never be very keen on God!

**Now, WHY was John the Baptist "A Voice"?**

WHY did he come "Preaching" "Saying" "Warning" ? WHY?

**-Because he expected people TO CHANGE the way they were living**

He said,                    *"Repent"*  
He said,                    *"Prepare the way for the Lord"*  
He said,                    *"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance"*  
He said,                    *"Every tree that does not produce good fruit  
will be cut down and thrown into the fire"*

**He spoke because he expected changed lives.**

He expected repentance.

Which means:            He expected a turning AWAY from selfishness and  
                                  He expected a turning TOWARDS God.

He expected people to listen to his words and weigh them and then act on them. **He did NOT expect them to be drowned out or ignored or rejected.**

He expected TRUTH to trump (!) feelings and emotions.

He expected people to hear the truth and shape their lives by that truth.

(4)

This USED to be the norm when Britain was a much more Christian country but it is not the norm any more. **BUT IT MUST BE FOR US.**

**It is what makes us, as Christians, distinctive.**

- That we have a Lord and Master.**
- That we listen to his voice.**
- That we follow him willingly.**
- That we live to please him, first**

A Post-Truth approach to life is NOT for us.

Our task is to show a post-truth world how, in fact, **the truth sets us free and liberates us.**

**And sets us on a BETTER course.**

We ALL need to be voices crying in the wilderness of this post-truth world, **“Prepare the way for the LORD”!**

It’s the eternal message of Advent.

And so we are ALL called to be John the Baptists.  
Everyone one of us!

The message has to go out, has to be communicated:  
“Prepare the way for the Lord”!