

ON OUR SIDE

Matins, 30th September 2018, Trinity 18.

Texts: Psalm 124; Esther 7, 1-6, 9/10, 9, 20-22; James 5, 13-20; Mark 9, 38-50.

Introduction

If the Lord himself had not been on our side, - then our enemies would have swallowed us alive! – The opening verses of today's Psalm echo Queen Esther's amazing story; - of Haman's evil plot to annihilate the Jewish exiles, by a contrived Royal decree. Haman's malign plot anticipates the Wannsee Conference of 20 January 1942, - the convention called to solve the *Jewish Question*: the political-moral *Question* that was *answered* in the gas chambers, - *The Holocaust* that consumed six million innocent lives. Tragically there was no latter-day Queen Esther to overturn that gross a-moral decision, - the resolution taken by fifteen senior Nazis (more than half of whom were noted academics). How could this happen? Had everyone lost their moral compass?

And anti-Semitism continues to be a burning issue, together with widespread suspicion of *The Others*, - those who don't look like us, or who speak another language. These are real challenges, as we are seen to be distancing ourselves from our friends and relations across the Channel, - those who have helped to keep the peace in Europe for the past seventy years. Winston Churchill was vital to Britain's survival in the 2WW. In 1948 he said, - *We hope to see a Europe where men in every country will think as much of being European, as belonging to their native land. We hope wherever they go on the European Continent, they will truly feel, "Here, I am at home."*

We should not ignore the current rise of Neo-Nazism, nor forget that the revengeful Versailles Peace Settlement imposed on Germany in 1919 and the global economic crash, that sowed the seeds for Hitler's rise to power and the next conflict, and the evil decision at Wannsee just 23 years later! Our Jewish neighbours do not forget their turbulent history of repeated oppression; two and a half thousand years later they still celebrate the Festival of Purim. Sadly European history is too often neglected, - at the cost of continuing to repeat past mistakes! Some fail to recall that the primary purpose of the European Union was not economic, - it was, - it still is to maintain peace, - to prevent Europeans fighting each other. Witness those young men recorded our war memorial and countless others around the World. And also the need to defend Western Europe against external aggression, - that is why we have soldiers stationed in the Baltic States and we have not withdrawn all our military assets from Germany.

Der Führer

In 1934 Herman Göring roused the crowd at a Nazi rally on the Hesselberg, when he lauded Adolf Hitler as the latter-day Messiah, asking: "Has there been in Germany a deeper, or more passionate faith than today? When has there been stronger faith than the present faith in our Führer?" By 1942 most German Christians had lost their voices: the Roman Church had been neutralised by the *Reichskonkordat* with the Vatican and the Protestant churches had been suppressed, converted to Nazism, or driven underground. Christian morality had been over-whelmed by popular nationalism and anti-Semitism.

In the 1930s, when Fascism and anti-Semitism marched in our streets; - some Christians were reluctant to speak, whilst others were sympathetic to Hitler's Germany. Then there was a need for prophetic voices, - as there is now; - we may commend Bishop Nick Baines' trenchant leader and other articles in the last week's Church Times and the letters this week.

Politics

Archbishop Welby has been criticised for interfering in politics, when religion and politics are two sides of the same coin. They both deal with how we cope with where we are, how we live in harmony with our neighbours and how we address the future. Whilst Justin Welby does not declare any party allegiance, he has shown himself to be on the side of the poor, - those oppressed by debt, lack of social housing and other injustices. Red top journalists may ask, - How dare Justin Welby speak of the polarisation of society, to offer advice to our elected representatives, especially as he only answers to God, or at least his own conscience! After all we are governed by professional politicians? Surely they must know what has to be done! But do they? Too many are swayed by the slogans of ill-informed popularism, prejudiced media, false facts, in-fighting or self-interest. *We do live in interesting times*, when current politics is failing to grasp the big issues effectively, for the benefit of all, in the longer term.

Saltiness

So what did Jesus say? *He who is not against us is on our side*. And what did Christ mean, when he spoke in metaphors, of the merits of salt; of being salted by fire, of salt that has lost its seasoning? He said, - *You must have salt within yourselves, and be at peace with one another*. As his latter day disciples, we are being challenged to be politically effective, to *season* our society, - by loving God and our neighbours as ourselves. Jesus said, - *no one who performs a miracle in my name will be able the next moment to speak evil of me*. Actions demonstrate and reinforce our words; - they show us those who are in harmony with us.

On Our Side

Our Archbishop could avoid engaging in politics (there is enough political strife within the Anglican Communion), but he has spoken out and he deserves to be heard, not only in political and financial spheres, but also in the BREXIT Debate. Our democracy is precious, we should hold MPs to account, - and listen to Justine Greening. The major decisions yet to be taken will affect future generations; - those who may ask of us, - *How did **they** get us into this mess?*

However, there must be hope, as we try to build God's Kingdom of peace and harmony on the Earth. In his pastoral letter to a young church, James exhorts them, - and us to grasp the big and the local issues, - and to pray with and for one another. We recall that, - *If the Lord had not been on our side, - then our enemies would have swallowed us alive!* So let us continue to pray and to act together for the needs of God's Creation and all those who wish to live in harmony in His Earthly Kingdom. Amen.

Words ~ 1,060