

Alveston Methodist Church

Greenhill, Alveston. BS35 3RA

10:30am Sunday 28 September 2025

Lectionary:

Amos 6:1a, 4-7;

Psalm 146;

1 Timothy 6:6-19;

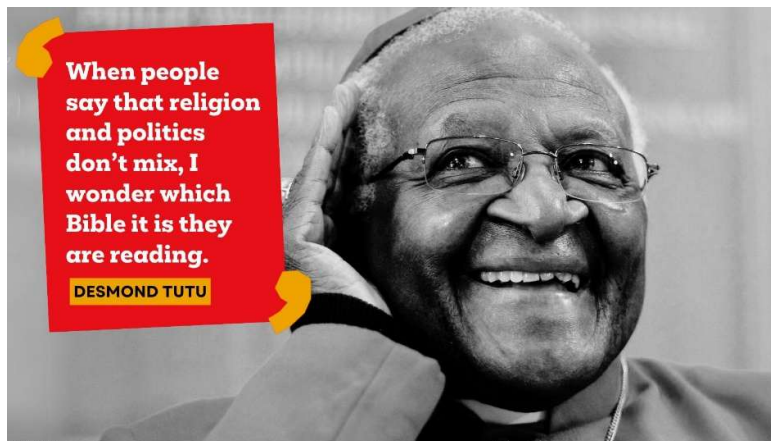
Luke 16:19-31

Sermon

Earlier we thought a little about the Psalmist's command to Praise the Lord and to be thankful, and this is right and proper.

But we are living in challenging, and potentially frightening times.

I make no apologies that some of what I will talk about here is political – it is not party Political with a capital P, but is rests firmly on the conviction expressed so well by Archbishop Desmond Tutu that “When people say that religion and politics don't mix, I wonder which Bible it is they are reading”

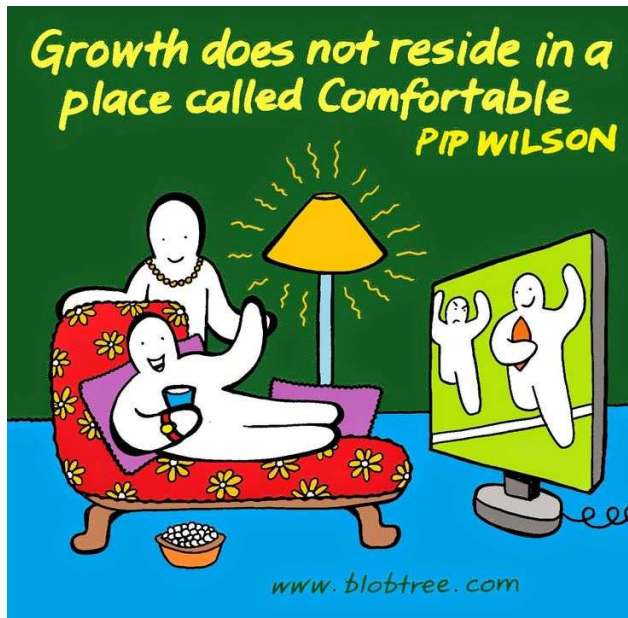


So I want to pick up on a later part of that same Psalm;

“⁹ The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.” (Psalm 146)

Our Old Testament reading in Amos warns us that complacent self-indulgence will be punished – God does not call us to be complacent.

The Christian youth worker, Pip Wilson, often pointed out that Growth does not reside in a place called Comfortable.



This is part of the challenge of our Christian life.

For many, their discovery of Christian faith came in the realisation that they were lost in sin and that the call of Jesus on their life was the only way out.

It has been said that “Jesus came to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable”. This is a part of what is being taught in our Epistle this morning.

The writer accepts there is a lot to be said for contentment – we bring nothing into the world, we take nothing from the world when we leave. If we have food and clothing why shouldn't we be content with that?

The problem is that we can get caught up in these material things, and take it to excess. Hence the writer warns that ‘the love of money is (the) root of all kinds of evil’ – and that this can draw us away from a life of faith.

If we are to be faithful then we should pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness – what Paul, elsewhere, describe as the ‘Fruits of the Spirit’.

In our gospel reading, Jesus’ teaching takes this further with the story of the Rich Man and the poor man, Lazarus.

The rich man paid no attention to the needs of Lazarus. Lazarus ached for the bare minimum provision of some scraps from the rich man’s table – but this was not to be. He was reliant on the dogs to come and lick his sores (there’s a whole other sermon to be found in the love of dogs – but that’s for another time).

In due course, both men died.

Jesus tells us that Lazarus is taken up to heaven, to be with Abraham.

The rich man is sent to hell (let's not mince words on this). He is in torment, but (maybe for the first time) he 'sees' Lazarus. He notes that Lazarus is in a good place with Abraham and begs that Lazarus might show him some kindness. Abraham rejects this and points out that in life the rich man had it all and Lazarus had nothing, why would Lazarus now offer him relief? Abraham also points out that even if Lazarus wanted to help him, there is a great divide between heaven where Abraham and Lazarus are, and hell where the rich man is. It cannot be crossed.

The rich man then pleads that Lazarus be resurrected to go and warn the rich man's brothers lest they end up in the same place he is.

But Abraham points out that they already have the teachings of Moses and the prophets to warn them, if they cannot listen to that, then why would they be convinced by someone rising from the dead?

You see we all have been warned. We have the teachings of Jesus, rooted in the traditions and teachings of the Old Testament (which was, after all, the Bible that Jesus knew). Yet, even though he was raised from the dead too many are unwilling to believe in Him.

That might be bad enough, but over history we have seen countless examples of where many have sought not only to not follow Jesus, but worse, to pervert Jesus' message of love to manipulate and control others – usually for their own personal gain.

Many people reject Christianity because they claim that religion has been the source of so many wars. Can anyone imagine the Jesus of the gospels with a machine gun?

Karl Marx claimed that religion is the flowers on the chains of our oppression that prevent us seeing those chains. In doing so he called people to revolt for they have "nothing to lose but your chains".

The sad reality is that both these examples are at least partly true.

Religion has been abused and misused to justify exploitation and control in order to prop up those in power. The crusades were a convenient mask under which the 'Christian' forces could dominate the 'Muslim' world – not to save their souls (that was the whitewash to the tale) but to take control of their countries and thereby their wealth.

The so called 'protestant work ethic' – "work hard in this life to secure a reward in the next" – was, as Marx pointed out, intended to keep the poor in their place and keep them working to enrich their powerful overlords. According to the sociologist Max Weber, this was the origin of capitalism.

It is beneficial in any situation to try to identify yourself with those in power, and to denigrate those who you make 'other'. Maybe they are 'different' because they do not look like you, they don't hold the same views you do, they didn't go to the 'right' school, or they are not part of your 'club'. Maybe they don't come from where you come from...

But this is NOT the Jesus way.

Jesus said 'Come to me ALL who are weary' – not just members of this clique or that subgroup. For Jesus the call was always ALL ARE WELCOME...

By this Jesus did not mean, all those who are members of my followers. Jesus did not restrict his call to those from Nazareth. Jesus was noted for hanging around with those that others thought were unacceptable – women, tax collectors, fishermen, sinners. The socially excluded of the time.

Jesus still wants to say “ALL ARE WELCOME” – as the singer/songwriter Mike Rayson put it, “I’m not loved because I’m worthy, I am worthy because I’m loved”

To paraphrase Paul in Galatians;

There is no longer male nor female, rich nor poor, gay nor straight, trans nor cis, disabled nor non-disabled, black nor white, local or foreigner, City or Rovers!

ALL ARE WELCOME

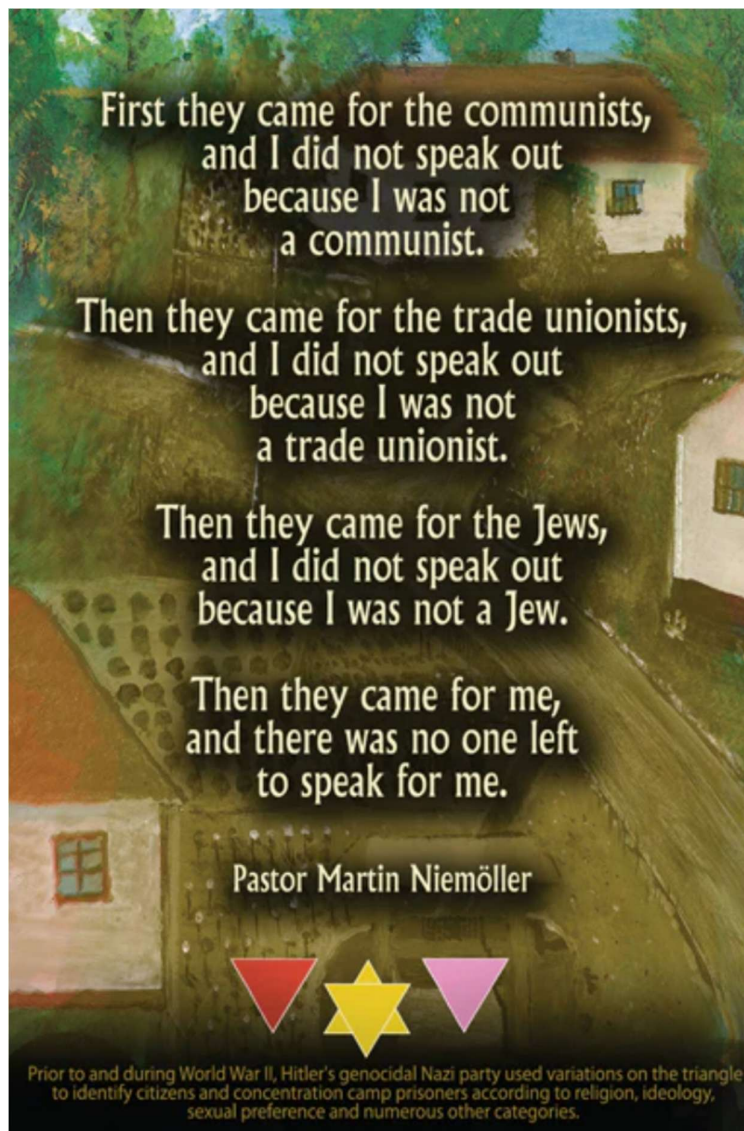
In our country at this time there are those who would sow the seed of division. In their fears about their own needs being met, they are vilifying those who are most vulnerable. At the moment they blame the immigrants – because they are a soft target, they are ‘other’. But Jesus says “ALL ARE WELCOME”. How can a wealthy country, where even the poorest in our society can be helped and supported, turn its back on those who have even less than us? And where many of those are fleeing situations that we have helped create – wars, deprivation, exploitation caused by our greed, by our need to sell weapons even to oppressive states like Israel.

But bear in mind, the far right, who are playing on the fears of many in this country, do not care for those they are whipping up. Nigel Farage and Tommy Robinson and the like are not actually interested in making life better for the poor in our society – all their efforts are to prop up their own personal well being. If Farage were interested in ‘real’ people he might actually do the job he’s paid to do and attend parliament, meet with his constituents... If Robinson were actually interested in his followers he would be alongside them in their campaigns, rather than sunning himself or taking world trips, funded by their donations.

Once the immigrants have been blamed, who next? We know from history that campaigns that start by focussing on one community, grow and vilify others – the Jews, the gays, the gypsy’s, the disabled, all minority groups – we saw this in 1930’s Germany and it lead directly to the concentration camps and death.

This is not the Jesus way – Jesus says “ALL ARE WELCOME”

In Jesus’ name we need to echo that, we need to proclaim that Christianity belongs to the Church universal, and is not a prop for hatred and division – as it has been used in the USA and as we are starting to see attempts to use it here and we need to shout out that in Jesus’ name “ALL ARE WELCOME”.



Pastor Martin Niemoller wrote;

First they came for the Communists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist
Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist
Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew
Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me.

We must proclaim, for Christ's sake – ALL ARE WELCOME
AMEN