

**Jeremiah 17: 5-10; 1 Corinthians 15: 12-20; Luke 6: 17-26**

Well it has to be said that Jeremiah never misses his audience and hits the wall, if you know what I mean. He tells it like it is and he doesn't spare the people and he doesn't spare us. And basically his question is this: Where are you sinking your roots? Where are you getting your truth, your nourishment from? Who forms your understanding of yourself and the world and God?

And he has this powerful image of people who just put their trust in mere mortals as being like a shrub in the desert, waterless and windswept. And he really lays it on thick. He says live like this and it will be like living in the parched places of the wilderness, an uninhabited salt land.

This he contrasts with someone who seeks the Lord, because they will find water, they'll be able to put down roots, and flourish and their leaves will be green and they'll bear abundant fruit. And in times of drought, hard times like we all go through, this tree, this person is going to endure, because they're deeply rooted and those deep roots will still find life-giving water even in the hardest times.

So where are we looking to find life and truth and direction from, what's shaping our hearts and our minds? It's not easy in our modern 24/7 frantically busy world to make sure that we're putting down roots in good places. Our minds are almost assaulted by a barrage of stimuli which our grandparents never had to face and which we can struggle to process – you know, to sort out the wheat from the chaff. There's been a lot of talk just recently about the effect of social media on the young. Social media can be great for keeping us in touch, it can be a fantastic tool, but people are worried about cyber bullying. Kids can't just go home from school and feel safe because all sorts of stuff comes into their phones – they can be made to feel bad about themselves, they can even be led into thoughts of suicide. The world can feel like a very hostile, unsafe place and there's no escape.

Even the fevered nature of our politics just now doesn't help. We've got fake news, alternative facts (what on earth does that mean?) And in so many ways in so many countries, both sides of the Atlantic, there's a lot of heat, but very little light. There's a lot of noise, but wisdom seems to be in very short supply.

This is not a great situation to be in. But the words of the prophet are a life-giving challenge to the Church for us remember where we're meant to be rooted and to be God's prophetic voice for each other and for the world God loves. Simon and Garfunkel, when they wrote "The Sound of Silence" could hardly have envisaged the noisy frantic world we have now, but it's almost like they did:

And the people bowed and prayed  
To the neon god they made  
And the sign flashed out its warning  
In the words that it was forming

And the sign said, "The words of the prophets  
Are written on the subway walls  
And tenement halls"  
And whispered in the sounds of silence

The song tries to point us back to a deep, silent place where our healing is to be found. Be still and know that I am God, says the psalmist. This is the God who is not heard in the noise and the thunder and the big dramas of this world, but in a still, small voice.

And it's to this unexpected, upside down ways of seeing the world and people that Jesus points in the Beatitudes. Suddenly it's the poor, the hungry, the excluded who get the best seats at the banquet. You have to sink your roots very deep to get that kind of wisdom. You have to get beneath the surface of all the noise and the clamour and the Hello magazine lifestyle that's fed to us as the good life, to even begin to see the world this way – like Jesus sees it, like God sees it. And this isn't that Jesus is saying poverty, hunger and being excluded or reviled are good things in any way. Far from it. What Jesus is pointing to I think is summed up in one of the Beatitudes in Matthew's version: How blessed are those who know their need of God.

If you have no illusions of power, of being in control of everything in your life then you do know your need of God. You know where to sink down those roots. You know that you depend on God. And this is true for all of us. In different ways we can all find ourselves poor – we don't have everything we need; hungry – because there can be things our hearts long for and maybe need; and excluded, because maybe we have relationships that have broken down or we've been in places where we haven't been accepted. All these things point us back to our need for God.

The other way Jesus tries to make us understand this is to say that we need to be like children, like a little child. If you want to see the kingdom, if you want true wisdom, then you need to be open, the trust, the expectancy of children.

All of which for me was maybe pointed to in what I thought was the best bit of news in an otherwise depressing week – for news anyway. Hundreds of thousands of children around the world taking a prophetic stance on climate change – an issue they all seemed to be passionate about. Boldly, they spoke truth to power, and they had a great chant: This is what democracy looks like. The young people who were interviewed were incredibly articulate. Clearly they had connected with a deep value about something that really matters, and they voiced a simple truth for all of us to hear. Jeremiah would have been proud of them and Jesus too.

How blessed are those who know their need of God. We need to consciously sink our roots where the real life-giving water is to be found, to seek the things that matter and to be open to God in our own poverty. We need to come to God like children. And we will find him, in his Word, in this meal that we share, in our love for each other and in the sound of silence. Amen.

