

Reflection Pentecost 4 by Megan Cambridge (lay reader)

Fake news v Good news

There's a modern phrase 'fake news' and we are told there is a lot of it out there. We're expected to be discerning, to 'seek the truth' and disregard the lies. This is not always so easy to do. Listening to the debates that rage on the radio as I drive to work its baffling how there can be so many truths about one thing. Then there is the salesperson who wants you to buy something and the politician that wants to win the argument and the vote. I hear people at my work telling me a version of events that they think I want to hear, or that puts things in a more favourable light and, actually, if we are going to grapple with the weighty issues and face the unpleasantness, there needs to be truth.

We see something of this in the exchange between Hananiah the 'false prophet' and God's prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament reading. Hananiah had declared 'in the Name of the LORD' that God would come to the aid of His people. The items that were stolen from the temple would be returned, along with the thousands of Judeans that had been captured and taken away and all within two years. God is coming to the aid of His people as He did in the past and that's good news. We love to hear good news. Who likes hearing bad news? However, just because something agrees with what we want to be true does not make it true or right.

Jeremiah agreed that this would be wonderful and he wished the LORD would do that BUT he points out this contradicts what the prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah himself had proclaimed previously; the promise of judgment for the people's wickedness. It is going to get much worse before it gets better. It's not surprising that the people preferred Hananiah's version of the news, the 'fake news,' which was proved wrong when an invasion force of unparalleled destruction arrived instead. The temple was destroyed, as was all Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, conquered Judah and scattered and enslaved the people just as Isaiah and Jeremiah had foretold. We don't like bad news. Facing up to our failings is painful. Some of those truths proclaimed by the prophets are hard to listen to.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus is reaching the end of the commission He is giving to the disciples and what has gone before the verses in today's reading is not welcome news, not a cheerful prophecy, Jesus pulls no punches. They are being sent out 'as sheep in the midst of wolves' they will be brought before governors and kings for His sake and 'hated by all for My name's sake'. There is a long catalogue of undesirable outcomes but today we are told of the rewards (the good news) for those who receive, who welcome a prophet or a righteous person.

Jesus, God's Son, was the greatest of the prophets who was sent to redeem all mankind and Jesus proclaimed the entirety of Scripture, the hard to hear and the comforting – both the wrath of God for sin, but also, by believing in Him, redemption and our slate wiped clean; the very best news.

So today we are being reminded of the need to give thanks for those prophets and righteous people who faced the unpopularity, hatred and persecution to spread the truth, the good news. Alongside that, though, we also need to accept that same challenge to reach out and pass on the message. Not fake news; the truth, the whole truth, the very good news indeed.