

Trinity 4, Matins

23rd June 2024

Mother Emma

In our Matins sermon last Sunday we heard from Fr Tim that Jeremiah the prophet was sent to the people of Israel to declare to them the word of the Lord. He was called to emphasize God's loving relationship with them and the assurance of his presence, but he was also to speak to them with TOUGH LOVE, as Fr Tim put it, about the ways in which they were going wrong.

In this morning's reading, Jeremiah focuses his attention particularly on those Israelites enticed by the peoples living around them to turn aside from God, adopting their pagan superstitions, and beginning to worship carved and golden idols in the place of God. He describes how these are created by the skill of "*cunning men*", put together from wood from the forests, and gold and silver from the mines, and exuding richness and colour and sparkle.

We are probably all familiar with the old adage, "*All that glitters is not gold*". Today's summary of Jeremiah's condemnation of idol worship could perhaps be summarized, "*All that glitters may or may not be gold, but it is emphatically not God*". However rich and glittery and expensively adorned the idols may be, they stand still and do not speak; idols have nothing of the power of the true God - they can neither cause harm, nor help by answering prayers. They are deceptive and impotent, "*vanity and the work of errors*", and they cannot compare with the God of the house of Israel.

The Lord's power is of a completely different kind - his power is seen not in stationary carvings, but in the whole earth and the heavens which tell forth his glory, the rain and the winds, which he brings "*out of his treasures*". To these we might add the awe-inspiring cycle of seasons and harvests, the sun, moon, stars and planets, the plants, animals and human beings who exist thanks to his creative power.

The Israelites should not narrow their gaze and their aspirations to small, golden objects - they should look around them at the wonders of nature and the abundance of God's good gifts to them, opening up their minds and hearts to the One who has made all things. Meanwhile in our second reading from the Epistle to the Romans, St Paul speaks not simply of God's creative power, but of his limitless wisdom and knowledge:

"O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?"

Perhaps we might be reminded by both Jeremiah and Paul of Voltaire's images of our relationship to God being something like that between ants and people; an ant going about

his daily business might well find it impossible to conceive of something so huge and powerful as a human being.

Very often today, people may try to put God in a box, deciding to go to church for baptisms, marriages or funerals, saying to the passing priest, *"Say one for me, Vicar"*; praying in times of distress, but perhaps forgetting to pour out praise and thanksgiving when their prayers are answered.

When you think of God, what do you have in your imagination? Do you look around you at the beauties of creation, the power of wind or sea or flame, and see within them the unimaginable power of God? Or are we tempted to make our God smaller and less significant, and let ourselves be distracted by the idols of our day? And what are our idols today? What glittery, rich, expensive idols seduce us into thinking that they are themselves power and perfection, and to bow down before them? Who are the cunning craftsmen, who create the illusion of beauty and richness and desirability which turn us away from the wholehearted worship of God?

Perhaps one might be tempted to look at the internet, at social media, at AI, channels by which impossible images of perfection and loveliness are promulgated as though they were everyday reality, until we are drawn into a desire to follow them, even at the cost of our own mental, physical and spiritual health. Our modern society often follows the cult of celebrity, captivated by those whose wealth or style, power or success lead us to think that these are what is truly important in life.

Nowhere in Scripture does God – or Christ – suggest that huge wealth or fame are the source of happiness – rather the opposite - or that the powerful are closest to God's heart, instead of the poor in spirit. Jesus frequently condemns the rich and the greedy, together with the arrogant, who trample on those less fortunate. He urges us not to spend our lives in accumulating more things, which could be destroyed by moths or taken by thieves, rather than placing our trust and our attention on God's kingdom.

Jeremiah tells the people of Israel that all their graven images will perish, because, unlike God, they are not immortal, and so will the kind of idols we might be tempted to follow today. Like the people Jeremiah was addressing, we live in a time where peace feels fragile, and in which we may fear the collapse of systems and institutions we believe in. As it was for them, this is a time when we should fix our eyes on God, not being distracted by idols or superstition or glittery gold, but standing before him with our hearts and our hands open to receive his comfort and his hope and to share his story and his glory with others, so that they too may be drawn into the strength and compassion of his love.

In the words of St Paul to the Romans:

For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever, Amen.