

21st January 2021

Dear Friends,

As always I wonder how you are, and hope that this letter finds you both well and safe.

It is a very blustery day I am watching the clouds race across the sky, catching glimpses of the sun from time to time, along with flurries of sleet, sometimes rain, sometimes definitely snow! As I sit I am reflecting on the news from yesterday and how it is that as so often the world is full of light and shadow.

I am reading the news headlines as the world celebrates the inauguration of Joe Biden as President of the United States, and Kamala Harris as Vice President. The speeches were inspirational, as was the news of a swift implementation of executive orders including reengaging with the World Health Organisation and signing up to the Paris Climate Change Agreement. Kamala Harris, the first woman Vice President expressed her hope like this:

My abiding hope—my abiding prayer—is that we emerge from this ordeal with a new wisdom.

To cherish simple moments.

To imagine new possibilities.

And to open our hearts just a little more to one another.

To open our hearts to one another just a little more, perhaps this is our deepest need, for I am aware that while I rejoice in this change of leadership in the USA, others don't, and the nation, much like our own, and let's face it the whole world, is in need of deep healing and grace. We need perhaps to walk a mile in another's shoes, or simply to stand in them for a moment to acknowledge that we all see things differently. This may have been best expressed yesterday by the young poet Amanda Gorman as she captivated so many of us with hope, as she expressed a longing:

To compose a country (world) committed to all cultures, colours, characters, and conditions of man (humanity)

And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us.

We close the divide because we know, to put our future first, we must first put our differences aside.

To put differences aside is to turn from what has been, not to deny it, but to choose to change, and of course we need to do this as individuals and together. Perhaps this is what Jesus was referring to when he called the first disciples to change their lives and follow:

After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee preaching the Message of God: "Time's up! God's kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message."

Passing along the beach of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew net-fishing. Fishing was their regular work. Jesus said to them, "Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass." They didn't ask questions. They dropped their nets and followed.

A dozen yards or so down the beach, he saw the brothers James and John, Zebedee's sons. They were in the boat, mending their fishnets. Right off, he made the same offer. Immediately, they left their father Zebedee, the boat, and the hired hands, and followed. (Mark 1: 14-20)

Take time to note the opening words: "After John was arrested", John was arrested for speaking truth to power, for being a prophetic voice that called out Herod's corruption and collusion with the Roman authorities.

It was into this political climate that Jesus went to Galilee, to the sea shore calling the disciples to follow him! Jesus calls us into engagement with the world as it is, calling us first to change and then to be agents of change within it, faith meets politics when we seek to follow Jesus in this world, and that can be tricky, would I dare to say that the "prophets" who declared that Donald Trump would triumph had no faith, well no I wouldn't, and I wonder what it would be like to be in their shoes today. Somehow prayerfully and carefully we need to find our way to following Jesus in this world, to find the place of grace and unity that is so needed.

For me, that means being woke! According to the Oxford English Dictionary "woke" is defined as: "Originally: well-informed, up-to-date. Now chiefly: alert to racial or social discrimination and injustice." I need to be aware of the news, of what is going on around me, but I can also apply that to prayer and what is going on within me, seeking out where God is at work in me and in the world and choosing to join in. The danger is that I have my own bias and must therefore continually look to the life of Jesus who calls me beyond my small self to work and walk with him, to see the kin(g)dom of God coming about. I share again some words from Amanda Gorman's poem:

*We will not march back to what was, but move to what shall be:
A country (world) that is bruised but whole, benevolent but bold, fierce and free.
We will not be turned around or interrupted by intimidation because we know our inaction and inertia will be the inheritance of the next generation.
Our blunders become their burdens.
But one thing is certain:
If we merge mercy with might, and might with right, then love becomes our legacy and change, our children's birth-right.*

As the world begins to emerge from the horrors of the Covid-19 pandemic, and let's face it with the UK recording the largest number of deaths yesterday this struggle is far from over, we need to find new ways to walk and work together, seeking mercy not sacrifice, nor scapegoat then maybe we are on the Jesus road to a better world. Remember, Jesus lived in a world in turmoil, just as we do. With that in mind I leave you with the words of a hymn.

*1. Jesus calls us o'er the tumult
of our life's wild restless sea;
day by day his voice still calls us
saying, 'Christian, follow me.'*

*2. As of old Saint Andrew heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and work and kindred,
leaving all for Jesus' sake.*

*3. Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world's golden store,*

*from each idol that would keep us,
saying, 'Christian, love me more.'*

*4. In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
Jesus calls, in cares and pleasures,
'Christian, love me more than these.'*

*5. Jesus calls us: by your mercies,
Saviour, may we hear your call,
give our hearts in glad obedience,
serve and love you best of all.*

So, I wish you well, and you remain in my prayers. I will repeat if a conversation would help please don't hesitate to be in touch.

Peace and blessings



Reverend Sally Coleman