

3before Advent Proper 27 2021

When I worked at the Church of Christ the King in Frankfurt, which was then in West Germany - in my 20s - every year at this time of the year we had what was called a stewardship Sunday - everyone knew it was coming around, some tried to avoid it - but you couldn't avoid it - if your name was on the role, you would be contacted. How much are you going to give? And this Gospel reading was often used. Give until it hurts! it seems to say. But that is not what Jesus was about. He didn't want a widow with no means of support to give her last pennies, making herself homeless, into a corrupt Temple system which he had already condemned, by throwing over the tables of the traders whom he said were making his Father's house into a den of thieves. This is not praise for an impoverished woman, but a lament for institutionalised religion which thinks it is more important than God.

I spoke on the telephone this week to a dear friend whose husband died on Friday after a long battle with cancer. She was frightened that God would not welcome her husband into heaven because he was not a regular church goer, but she said 'he was a good man', I said, I am sure God loves good people for being good

just as much, if not more, than those who turn up every Sunday and are wicked for the next six days of the week.

So, the woman makes her sacrifice, and indeed, it is a sacrifice - a sacrifice to a very corrupt system, one which Jesus has often condemned. Sacrifice is a dangerous notion. It is dangerous because it often asks those who are the most vulnerable to give the most - our British taxation system and our benefit systems exemplify this. We ask those in the so-called working class (why are we so bedevilled by class?) and those who are poor to bear the weight of tax imposition and benefit cuts, to the benefit of those who are wealthy. Those who earn less than average pay a greater part of their income in tax than those who earn or receive more than average. These are the people Jesus warns us about - he says - beware of those who like to walk around in long robes - those who constantly want to be doing TV interviews, those who are seeking high office for the sake of being important, not because they can contribute to the common good - how long is it since you hear of someone speaking of the common good?

Let us think not of the woman but of the two coins she put into the treasury. They represent hope and faith. Or even hope and

belief. Hope and faith and how these things can be lived out in our daily lives, not simply by ritual, Eucharist on Sunday, baptisms, requiem masses, marriage service, - not by saying Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer every day - but by how we live our lives.

Think about the climate challenge. I love to have six or more small lamps on every evening, rather than one overhead light but one overhead light uses a lot less electricity. So, I wrote this using three lights, a compromise - but is that enough? Sacrificial enough?

Of course, few of us will have problems with those who wander around in long robes and say long prayers; I can't remember the last time I wore a cassock outside of a church setting, and if asked without preparation to lead prayers I don't think I would take more than two minutes - after all God already knows what is on our hearts. In the middle of the night, when I can't sleep, (which is often) I simply sing in my head the Gloria and/or the Kyries.

So what are we to make of this text? Is our current complicity of violence and oppression as we seek to keep beyond our borders the victims of climate change, flood and fire a response

in the name of Jesus? Is it enough to put soup tins in the Food Bank box, or, as I do support a hospital in Gaza? No, of course it is not enough. Of course, we have made a wonderful contribution by filling over one hundred Christmas shoe boxes with needy things and gifts which Blythswood will take to those in need in Eastern Europe, but we need to change the world which allows those in need to remain in need - and I suppose there are those in need on the Black Isle who would love a shoe box of good things, if only we knew how to find them We need to change the world where shoe boxes are not necessary.

Feeding the hungry and clothing those in need is important, of course it is, but the church must make its voice heard when it comes to the care of the orphan, the migrant, the widow and the poor, not as a self-righteous thing to do - but as the voice of Christ, shaping the body politic into one which recognises that Christ is our head. I make no apology for saying that - after all 'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,' Would that all the delegates to Cop 26 would recognise that.