**Jeremiah 23.23-29** - Am I a God near by, says the Lord, and not a God far off?  Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord.  I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’  How long? Will the hearts of the prophets ever turn back—those who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart? They plan to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, just as their ancestors forgot my name for Baal.  Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the Lord.  Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?

**Psalm 82**; Rise up, O God, judge the earth; for all the nations belong to you!

**Luke 12.49-56.** ‘I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!  Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!  From now on, five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.’

He also said to the crowds, ‘When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, “It is going to rain”; and so it happens.  And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, “There will be scorching heat”; and it happens.  You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

These are hard readings this morning. They are full of challenge to us and to how we see the world. We heard the prophet Jeremiah talking about ‘those who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart?’ And he goes on: They plan to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, just as their ancestors forgot my name for Baal.  Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the Lord.  Is not my word like fire, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?

This is unsettling stuff. And rightly so.

Somebody said to me once: no-one ever told me that God loves me. And I was horrified. Because, in the words of Julian of Norwich: Love was his meaning. Julian – who was a she, not a he – taught about an all-inclusive God. God made it; God loves it; God keeps it, was another of her truths. (As in: looks after it.)

And that remains, for me, an eternal truth. Love trumps everything – and God’s love most especially. However, love is not wishy-washy. And Jesus is here talking tough love. Love that is demanding and uncompromising. It is not just a hug for a friend in need; it is ‘who is my neighbour?’ And having established who the neighbour is, love is action to change things.

The Psalm set for this morning is a clarion call too: Rise up, O God, **judge** the earth; for all the nations belong to you!

One of those group exercises that probably every ordinand or curate has to endure at some stage on the vocational or formational journey is one that asks: what are the signs of a successful church? How do we know when we’re doing the right thing? And we duly talk among ourselves and come up with a set of multi-coloured post-it notes, beloved of all theological educators, that cover things like: numerical growth and preaching that people can understand, and investment in work with children and youth and all those things.

And then the theological educator, says: now shall we look in the Bible and see if we’ve missed anything out. Oh goodness, it says here that one of the signs of success is prisoners are released. Oh, and the blind get to see. And the poor hear the good news. And then we find, in Matthews gospel: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and visiting those in prison. And all the red-faced ordinands and curates remember how much social teaching is in the Old Testament as well as the New.

Successful churches are, as I may have said last week, noticing where God is at work and jumping on God’s bandwagon. And much of it has precious little to do with bums on pews or youth work except in a peripheral sense.

There are vast swathes of the Bible that draw our attention to what the kingdom of God will look like – both for today and in the very distant future – but we somehow manage to edit those bits out.

So here is Jesus, not prepared to let us off the hook, dispensing with the fuzzy wuzzy stuff and giving us the tough stuff to chew on. I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!

**Bread has to be broken in order that it can be shared … and a badly set limb has to be rebroken in order to make it whole again.**

And then Jesus delves into Micah. We might not instantly recognise it, but his listeners then would have done: for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; your enemies are members of your own household.

Micah was a prophet in the 8th century BC, who saw the destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem coming and wanted to make sure the people were held to account. He condemned what he saw while still promising that there was room for hope and restoration. God, like all good parents, wants us to succeed, not fail – but sometimes we need to be corrected for that to happen.

When we hear the word prophet, it’s not about seeing into the future as such; it often means someone who speaks the hard truths. And so it is here: Jesus is being prophetic; reminding a world that has lost its way that the Messiah came not to mend everything and make it all lovely, but to open our eyes to the mess we have made in so many ways. And this, as with Micah, is not about beating us down into despair; it’s about judgement and hope. It’s about thinking about the implications of how we are living and what we are doing, and it is all singularly important today when we consider our use of fossil fuels and our lax attitude to pollution – and climate change – and how we exclude people who are different from ourselves. And – and – and.

The prophets of today, as well as those of the Bible, point out where we are going wrong, but we choose – like the idiot Trump – to deny climate change, or at least to minimise its potential impact. Or to want to send refugees back ‘home’ in inverted commas – when where they came from doesn’t exist in any form that we would recognise as homely.

Chris and I watched a television programme last week about rubbish and recycling. And looking at the vast mounds of stuff that end up unnecessarily in landfill made me consider my own laziness. I always put the empty tins of dog and cat food in the recycling bin, but in my haste to get the animals fed, it is easier to open the kitchen bin and pop the lids in there. I’ve stopped doing that now. I can walk the extra few feet to the recycling bin if it means keeping an unnecessary tin lid out of landfill. I am ashamed that I was that uncaring. It’s a drop I the ocean, of course – but the ocean is made up of drops.

So, we pray, every time we come to church: Thy kingdom come. And we have some vague and woolly notion of peace and justice and everyone loving everyone. But what do peace and justice actually look like? I suspect the kingdom of God is going to be a whole lot different from the self-deluding pretty picture in our heads.

Like lots of what Jesus preaches, we’ll know that success is achieved when the hungry aren’t hungry any more and the lonely aren’t lonely any more; when the good news can be spoken in the corners of all the oppressed political regimes of the world; when we stop judging each other by our own standards and instead love according to God’s standards.

As Luke says: we can interpret the clouds and the winds to know the weather, but we need to be interpreting the present time. And acting accordingly. Because Love, indeed, was His meaning.

**Amen**