

## Thoughts on Terrorism – Epiphany 1 2015

Genesis 1 vv 1-5 p3, Psalm 29, Acts 19 vv 1-7 p1115, Mark 1 vv 4-11 p1002

“Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

I should say something today about the atrocities perpetrated in Paris last week, but what should I say? I can't tell you anything that you couldn't have read in the newspapers. I haven't any private sources of information. I'm not an expert on the politics of the situation or policing or national security. I'm not an authority on Islam. I've read the Koran, but I didn't understand it. So what should I say? The preacher isn't in the pulpit to give his own personal opinions or even his own insights. The preacher's calling is to proclaim the Word of God. So what is God saying in this situation – Jesus, the Word of God, the One Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life?

At our Lord's Baptism, God acknowledges Him in these words. “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Jesus is what God is like. So anyone who claims to be acting in the Name of God has to be judged in the Light of Jesus. This is true whether you are a Moslem or a Jew, or a Buddhist or a Hindu, an atheist or even a Christian. God is like Jesus. There is only one God and, while He makes Himself known to us in many ways, it is only in Jesus that the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily. Any idea of God which is inconsistent with Jesus is false. We even read the Bible in the Light of Jesus. How much more then must other claims about God be viewed in Christ's Light. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. So the jihadists are wrong, as are all those who perpetrate evil supposedly in the Name of God, whether they are Moslems, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, atheists or even Christians. There is only one God and God is love. If you are wondering why I include atheists in this paragraph, the answer is that militant atheists, such as Stalin and Mao, have been every bit as ruthless in attempting to impose their creed on other people as have adherents of almost all the world's religions, including – to our shame – Christianity. The evil lies in the human heart.

We move on to the question of how we deal with this wickedness. Again, the answer is Jesus - the Way, the Truth and the Life. Jesus is the Word of God. The words of Jesus teach us how the people of God ought to live. If you want a summary of what Jesus taught about how human beings should behave, you cannot do better than to read the Sermon on the Mount in St Matthew's Gospel, chapters 5, 6 & 7. Not only have I not got time to go through them all this morning, I would hardly dare to advocate living by the standards they set. You must read them for yourself, Matthew 5, 6&7. I would hardly dare to advocate living by the standards they set, but they are the only law by which it is possible truly to live.

Jesus did not, however, merely teach with words; He taught by example. Jesus was the only human being Who ever fulfilled God's perfect Law of Love. It cost Him His Life. This is what He said. “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” He lost His Life and gained the world. He gained the whole created order by His Death on the Cross.

“Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” All human beings were made to be the children of God. What then is the reason that some choose to become terrorists? It is the same reason that leads people to become addicted to sex and drugs and rock and roll. It is the same reason that people foul up their personal relationships. It is the same reason that

people get into crippling debt in order to buy things they do not require. Looking back to last week's sermon, it is the same reason that people "haste to rise up early, and so late take rest," labouring in vain because they are not working with God. Isaiah the prophet asks, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" As human beings, we are made to be the children of God. So long as we reject the fatherhood of God, we remain existentially dissatisfied. We are chronically discontented. We are always looking for something and we cannot find what we are looking for, because what we are really looking for is the very thing which we have rejected and continue to reject – the love of God in Jesus Christ. This rejection of God is what the Church calls original sin and it leads to all kinds of destructive behaviour. Jihadists are alienated from God and their fellow human beings. Their lives are meaningless, precisely because they do not truly know God. They worship an image, a false God. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Truly to know God is to have eternal life. This is joy in all its fullness. Truly to know God is to know that God is love. The truly religious man or woman affirms life, brings joy and gives and receives love. Only the truly religious person is a fulfilled human being. Anything less is idol worship and the consequence of idol worship is self-immolation. "The wages of sin is death." The answer is to repent and to be baptised, to be baptised into Christ so that the Holy Spirit comes upon us and we hear the Father's voice, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Jesus is the One Who makes God known in His Epiphany, His manifestation to the nations, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of God's people Israel. He is also the One Who teaches us, both by His preaching and by His example, the only way to live. He is the One Who lives the life which all human beings ought to live and must live if they are to fulfil their potential as the children of God and to know the blessings of eternal life. He is also the Redeemer, the remedy for our sin. He is our Saviour. Jesus is the only One Who can overcome evil and He overcomes evil with love. We come to Him as sinners, slaves to sin and the fear of death. Jesus redeems us by His Death on the Cross. He sets us free. God sent Jesus into the world so "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world: but that the world through him might be saved".

So the Word of God in this situation is the same as the Word of God in every situation, Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. It is the rejection of the Truth which lets in evil. It is in following the Way that we discover how to live. Jesus is the Life. I can't speak authoritatively about the practicalities of politics or policing; there are people who know far more about those things than I do. But what you and I can say as Christians is that Jesus is the answer. In Him we find our peace. In Him we discover how to respond to the evil in the world. In Him we have the remedy. So our calling is to remain faithful, to bear witness by what we say and do, above all to bear witness by what we are, and to pray. The prayer book collect for today seems especially appropriate in the present situation. Let us pray.

*O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*  
Amen.