

New Kilpatrick
Sermon
6th December 2015
I Samuel 2:1-10

Spirit... in word and in song... inspire us... with the word that become flesh and the song that invites us into justice... call us... Come now... once more... and continue to reshape who we are... and who we shall become... So be it... Amen

I used to listen to the charts... every Sunday... Remember the Hit Parade... That was my generations version of that... except we didn't call them hits... and we didn't parade them... But every Sunday afternoon at 4 o'clock... Radio One counted down every song from 40... to number one... They've moved it to a Friday now...

I remember so many good songs... Dire Straits... U2... Travis... Texas... That's my generation's version of Cliff Richard... Shirley Bassey... and Tom Jones... O aye... I like Tom Jones... Yes... I know they were made of sterner stuff and are all still around compared to those I listened to who are all now old music teachers or quantity surveyors... (apologies to all QS's - my dad was one too... though he didn't start out as a pop star)...

But even the hits of the 60s... didn't produce the kind of song that lasts generations... Even they didn't have the words that somehow summed up the hopes of not just a generation but a nation and that nation's future... That's a big ask... and few have done it... in fact... is there any song that does that?...

The answer is... of course... yes... There is... Indeed there *are*... and all of them can be found in the Bible... big songs that people... when they first heard them... recognised in them... words that were sung... not just for them... or about them... but were the very promise for the future... These were powerful words... that were born at moments in history that were the very shape of the future...

Now some may wish to turn Hilary Benn's closing speech in parliament on Wednesday into such a song... for perhaps that was a moment that will shape the future... I'm not sure he'd necessarily be proud of that... and hopefully less still of the riot of cheers that immediately followed... as so many of our MP's were witnessed cheering for the support of war... carried away by the moment perhaps... in some dark enthusiasm... But it wasn't the proudest moment in our parliament...

But his will not be made into song... Those songs we have... that are recognised as turning moments in history... speak not of war... but of a future for peace...

We heard Isaiah's song last week... Hannah has sung hers this week... Zechariah... Mary and Anna will perform theirs in incarnations hit parade in the weeks to come... These are words that hold promise... shape hope... set free salvation... give us the vision for a different view and outcome to history... in our future...

These aren't gathered round great military campaigns... or whole nations being moved by events... or even the outbreak of peace... Each song carries the hope... in a child being born... And this is a remarkable thing... because these moments... that are steeped in salvation... do not come from institutions... churches... parliaments... agencies... or movements... but a single life...

Everything is reduced to this... All the possible outcomes of the future... all the vision and hope for coming generations... is found in the birth of a solitary child... who knows nothing of this...

In last week's song of Isaiah... the child was one born to a woman in the court of the king... This week... the child is born to a barren woman... who was so desperate for a child she'd do anything... even give him away to the temple as soon as he was weaned...

And generations have believed... the possibility of salvation... for all our futures... is not in a programme... a policy... a manifesto... or a political movement... but something living... and newly born... And in each case... a song is placed into their story... songs... you do not expect to hear on the lips of someone who has just given birth... These are songs of thanksgiving for the whole nation...

Because God has answered the prayers that come from the deep personal struggle of a woman... a faithful woman... in a manner that leads to a far greater and more radical change in the fortunes of not just one... but everyone...

The point is... God... love... invests the future... through people... not in processes or institutions or programmes... God invests our salvation in the youngest of our people... and when we recognise these children... as living hope... rather than our enemy... when we live to preserve their life... and feed the potential in people... rather than turn to war... when we fill them with our longings and hopes and futures... when we invest our salvation in them...

The child holds the salvation of the nation... when we place our future in them... When we see that child as something more than collateral... or believe their life is not cheap or expendable... because our future means something through them... If names are left unknown... and life becomes cheap... and everyone becomes an expendable enemy... and we lose those children... then the salvation of our humanity... is also lost...

Our salvation is bound up in the child...

But Hannah's song is a song of thanksgiving... for the one who will begin the salvation of Israel... and look how the song tells it... God will break the bows of the mighty... God will deprive... those who are full... and raise up... the poor... those who are powerful... will be brought down... those who have much... what they have will be given to those who have least... This is the song of Hannah...

It might sound a little unkind... indeed... it might sound harsh to us who know we live near the top of the top half of the rich and powerful in the world... compared to continents of poverty...

But the point of the song... is not to take each clause literally... but to recognise that all the things in which we see as our strength and power... the finance... the arms... the accumulation... can be lost... Those things we work for in a world that recognises might... will all be lost... It is as nothing...

It is God who brings life... It is Love who gives barren women children... Every sense of self-security... every *human* plan for salvation of one kind of another... can be... and ultimately will be... lost... Only God grants those things... and God does so... in surprising ways and in unlikely places...

And that is a truth always to remember... when war is debated... when we shape our community... when we work out the priorities for our nation... when we decide how our welfare should be structured... when we discuss what church should look like...

God has birthed the promise of our salvation in those we place our hopes in... God has made sure... salvation and hope are found in the same place... and ultimately... but the bible says not solely... in a stable... in a manger... in a little town of Bethlehem...

These old songs... that recognise how we care for those people... shows also how we care about our salvation... Such songs will outlast even Cliff Richard... or Adele's... or whoever is in the charts... because it is a theme sung in our souls... where our hopes lie... all the clearer in advent time... and will be sung in the places of struggle and fear... because that is where they were born... and will be sung for generations yet to come... because still we have hope... still the promises of God... and our salvation... are to be found among us...

It is what incarnation is about... let us sing those hope-filled... salvation-filled songs... for the world to hear... for it needs to hear them so much more today...

References

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