

Matthew 10:24–39, Jeremiah 20:7-13

We are still in anxious times at the moment, as restrictions on daily life, due to the coronavirus, are eased. The upsurge in demand for racial justice, *Black Lives Matter*, has also become urgent and challenging for all of society. This has been added to the political uncertainty which still exists over the Brexit deal negotiations. There have been so many stories of the suffering and loss of people caught up in all these, with added fears for future employment and finances as our economy goes into recession. It is unsettling for everyone. We've heard messages from the Queen, Prime Minister, politicians and leaders of various faith communities.

What does our faith say to us in these times?

There are some hints in today's readings:

In our Old Testament reading we hear of **Jeremiah**, who had the unenviable task of proclaiming God's message to a people who really didn't want to hear it (Often our situation today). He is feeling fearful and sorry for himself, because no-one listens to him, rather they mock and ridicule him, and make threats against his life.

'I have become a laughing-stock all day long; everyone mocks me... I hear many whispering: 'Denounce him! Let us denounce him! All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. 'Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him.' (v7, 10)

So, Jeremiah is anxious, afraid and uncertain. How does he respond?

v11 Jeremiah doesn't seek to take matters into his own hands. He looks to God, he trusts in God to defend him. He has confidence that God will deliver him from these threats.

v12 Jeremiah sees God as the one to judge people, not himself, or anyone else. God will judge people's hearts and motives correctly and with mercy.

v13 Jeremiah expresses his trust in praise to God, who is compassionate and cares for us. I think there are lessons for us to learn from Jeremiah here. Yes, we expect governments to act for the good of all, to protect and sustain the vulnerable, to uphold justice for all, but for Christians our trust is ultimately in God. God is the one who can keep us safe for all eternity. For those who risk the well-being of others, or fight against justice for all people, God is their judge, and we believe God will indeed judge all sinfulness rightly. Jeremiah didn't do nothing, he acted and spoke with great courage, calling others to act in God's ways. We can give thanks and praise to God, as Jeremiah did, as we trust in him and his faithful care for us.

In Jesus' teaching in our **Gospel** reading, he warns his followers of persecutions to come, and says of those who seek to do them harm, *'have no fear of them'* (v26)

Faith, trust in God, is the antidote to fear.

Jesus then goes on to affirm the value of each human being, created in the image of God, *'Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.'* (v29-31)

Such wonderful words! Jesus encourages his listeners to understand that each of them, and all people, are valued infinitely by God, and so to put their trust in God.

As Christians we need not fear anything or anyone, because God is greater. We look to God to be our strength and help.

But we can act too. **We can pray.** Prayer is so important and can be powerful.

We can ask God to restrain all who selfishly seek to promote their own interests above those of others.

We can pray for all experiencing loss and anxiety, for God's peace and healing in their lives.

We can pray for our own community, and especially for our church, and all Christians, to be able to show God's care and compassion to all people at this time.

We can pray for the NHS, carers, all key workers, as they seek to serve others.

We can pray for our Government, and for medical advisers, for wisdom and grace.

And in our own lives we can seek to live lives of love and trust, and not fear and division.

We can examine the prejudices of our own hearts, and seek God's grace to overcome our human selfishness, to love our neighbour as ourselves. By our lives and attitudes we can point to the one God who loves and values all people, who gave his son, Jesus Christ, to show how much he loves us. We can trust in God.