

## Prophecy

“Beware of false prophets” – the opening words of our reading just now (Matthew 7.15-20). Our Lord’s warning may at first sound rather alien to modern ears but it is really so strange?

In the Old Testament false prophets normally predicted good things: there will be victory over the enemies of Israel and Judah, all will be well – positive and optimistic and yet often in the event misleading words.

In contrast the true prophets were more realistic. They were not afraid to predict disaster when they saw it coming. And their concern was not so much for the future as for the present. Their call was frequently for a change of behaviour for the better, for a turning from selfishness and false idols to the commandments of the one true God.

Last Sunday the Church celebrated the birth of John the Baptist. John has often been seen as the last of the long line of prophets, as well as the forerunner of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Yet there have been prophets since. And the need for a prophetic voice in our own day is arguably even greater than ever.

One would like to think and hope that there are true prophets within the Church today: men and women who are not afraid to speak what they believe is God’s word for our world. Our Lord reminds us that whether a prophet is true or false can be seen not only with hindsight but also in the quality of their lives. Only a good tree bears good fruit.

True prophecy must be consistent with the Gospel, with the Good News of God’s love and compassion, of God’s justice yet mercy, of God’s peace. Those who preach hatred, prejudice and violence are clearly false. Those who preach repentance and change for the better are the ones to be listened to.

There is perhaps a link between false prophecy, on the one hand, and spin and false news, on the other. The true prophets of old could never be accused of any of that.

Christians should never be afraid to recognize disaster when we see it coming, be it in regard to political, economic or social situations, or to the environment. For we believe that God cares for his world and for all people. Our task as Christians, as those who seek to follow our Lord Jesus Christ, is to witness and point to that message of divine love.

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