

Twelfth Sunday of Pentecost 7 August 2016

[Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Psalm 50: 1-8, 23-24 ; Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-28; Luke 12:32-40](#)
from Vanderbilt

[Proper 14C / Ordinary 19C / Pentecost +12 Aug 7, 2016](#) from Textweek

When studying theology there is a great question that I'm sure every student is required to consider at some point during their studies.

The question is; "was it a good thing for the Church or a bad thing for the Church that Emperor Constantine became a Christian?"

By way of very brief background; the question relates to the year 312-313 when Constantine became a Christian; prior to that date the previous emperors had persecuted the Church and so it had become very much an underground movement. When Constantine converted it became not only acceptable but very much the thing to do, to become a Christian.

The reason that this is such a great question in the theology program is that there is no definitive answer, students are not going to be marked right or wrong; it's not a multiple choice option, rather it's one of those questions that opens the student's own thinking and understanding, and it invites a critical appraisal of the development of the Church.

We might wonder why the question is always asked in universities and rarely looked at within Church communities who presumably have a more real and tangible interest in the development of the church.

Now, moving on to when Jesus was doing his theology, it was of course a few hundred years before Constantine so he would have faced different questions.

Coming from a Jewish background much of his theology would have been encountered in the teachings of the temple and his reference books would have been primarily the Torah, together with the other books of what we now know as the Old Testament.

However, he also was grappling with some similar questions, the development of faith, the development of the temple (his Church) and the unfolding of the future.

One of Jesus' text books we've read from today, the Book of Isaiah and we've just read some of the vision of Isaiah that's contained in that book.

Isaiah's vision, like most visions was pointing to the future, and here we are today in that very same future that was being pointed to.

Likewise, Isaiah's vision was also pointing to that future in which Jesus was alive and well and doing his theology studies; and amazingly, Isaiah's vision still points from today toward tomorrow, for it is a vision of Divine unfolding rather than a prediction of what happens next.

Isaiah sees beyond the self-righteous faithfulness of Judah and Jerusalem and offers another reality by which to create a future and in verse 19 he spells out consequences for the paths into the future:

"If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; 20 but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

As we are now living in Isaiah's envisioned future we might ponder the consequences he spells out and consider them in relation to the present.

Isaiah has provided two clear options:

"you shall eat the good of the land" or "you shall be devoured by the sword".

Some world statistics:

- Some 795 million people in the world do not have enough food to lead a healthy active life. [Hunger Statistics | WFP | United Nations World Food Programme](#)
- There are 11 million people undernourished in developed countries [2015 World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics - World Hunger](#)
- World military expenditure in 2012 is estimated to have reached \$1.756 trillion;
- This corresponds to 2.5 per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP), or approximately \$249 for each person in the world;
- The USA with its massive spending budget, has long been the principal determinant of the current world trend, often accounting for close to half of all the world's military expenditure. [Global Issues](#)
- For the past 13 years U.S. military spending has increased 114 per cent.
- In 2007, the amount of money labelled 'wasted' or 'lost' in Iraq -- \$11 billion -- could pay 220,000 teachers salaries
- The Pentagon spends more on war than all 50 states combined spend on health, education, welfare, and safety [Business Insider](#)

It is very easy to argue that based on Isaiah's vision, and its consequential outcomes we are living the result of 'refusing' and 'rebellious' rather than enjoying the promise of the willing and the obedient.

And that same conclusion seems to have been apparent in Jesus' time and most probably is exactly what dawned on him whilst he was doing his theology studies.

So Jesus then teaches in his own words and to his culture a revised version of Isaiah's vision.

His own Church (or temple) has failed and so he points a way forward with some specifics for course correction.

The very first part of Jesus' teaching that we read in today's gospel is perhaps the most crucial and the starting point;
"Do not be afraid".

For it is our 'fear' that keeps us from following the path of Isaiah's "*willing and obedient*".

And fear still keeps us from hearing and following the course correction that Jesus reveals.

Our fear of not having enough is ironically exactly that which stops us, which stops us from eating "*the good of the land*".

And if we're not devoured by our own obesity, then the sword of \$1.756 trillion worth of military spending, and the rise of associated terrorism will eventually devour us.

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

"Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, 17 learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow."

The fears that rule our lives are very real, and they have deep rooted primeval origins.

Early in our evolution we sought to compete with the rest of creation for life, food and shelter, we evolved and found that working together in tribes could give us a competitive edge, but our fears of not having enough were brought forward in our evolution.

Isaiah and Jesus both speak of an enlightenment that moves beyond these early progressions in evolution, they do not seek to move us toward equality and all having the same, rather they point toward equity, even-handedness, fairness, impartiality, justice, justness, parity and fair-play.

They reveal a future lived beyond that primitive, primal fear of scarcity; and to the reality of life lived faithfully as a reflection of Divine abundance.

The theological question regarding Constantine's conversion always raises a number of issues, did that shift distort the radical nature of the community living in the light of Christ's revelation, and bring the Church into society's norms, and do we always measure success on quantity rather than quality.

And as we ask ourselves what did Constantine becoming a Christian really mean, so too we might ask the same of ourselves and each other.