

## **Trinity 4 [Proper 10 (C)]**

A sermon preached by the Rector, the Very Reverend Tim Barker, at the parish church of St Andrew Guernsey on Sunday 14 July 2019

*Readings: Deuteronomy 30 vv 9-14 and Luke 10 vv 25-37*

It is all too easy for something to be hidden in plain sight. In other words, something can be going on all around us but either we do not see it or we are not aware of what is going on behind what we see.

Ten days ago, I represented Guernsey at the annual National Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast in the Palace of Westminster. It was a fascinating opportunity to meet politicians and clergy from all over the British Islands and beyond, including people from Denmark, Hungary and Israel. But the part of the event that I found most challenging and moving was a fringe meeting I attended after the main event. It was about modern slavery.

We might be forgiven for thinking that slavery was abolished in the nineteenth century. It is true that Britain abolished slavery throughout its empire by the Slavery Abolition Act 1833 (with the notable exception of India), the French colonies re-abolished it in 1848 and the United States of America abolished slavery in 1865 with the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution. Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights prohibits the holding of persons as slaves.

But sadly, slavery has been reinvented in our generation – if, indeed, it ever went away. I should say that I will be speaking about some difficult and disturbing facts and figures in the next few minutes.

40.3 million people are estimated to be trapped in some form of modern slavery in the world today.

The estimate of the Global Slavery Index is that there may be 136,000 victims of modern slavery in the UK.

The Clewer Initiative has been established in the Church of England from the sale of the extensive property of a community of Anglican nuns who have sold their overlarge premises near Windsor and relocated to Oxford. To quote from the website of the Clewer Initiative:

‘Modern slavery is an umbrella term for all forms of slavery, trafficking and exploitation.

‘At the core of this crime is deception. Survivors of modern slavery tell stories of being sold a better life. They are often vulnerable, coming from areas where there is little possibility of work. They are offered a job, a chance to make money and to build a new life for themselves. Those who offer these opportunities may even organise their travel to a different country, controlling every aspect of their trip.

‘The job they are offered turns out to be a lie and instead they are forced to work in difficult and degrading conditions, with little or no pay. The threat of violence, to themselves or their families, hangs over them and traps them in their situation. Even if their trafficker does not physically control them, a mistrust of authority may stop them from going to the police.

‘This could be the reality for 136,000 men, women and children in the UK. Modern slavery knows no borders, and people of all ages and races can be victims. The 6,993

potential victims referred to the National Crime Agency in 2018 came from 130 different countries, the most common of which were the UK, Albania, and Vietnam.'

This is the story of one person who was a survivor of modern slavery in the UK:

'I was brought up by travellers although I don't know who my parents were. They were kind to me and looked after me. When I grew up I couldn't get any work. People don't like travellers and they don't like people who are different, like me.

'I couldn't read or write so I tried to get labouring jobs.

'One day a group of men turned up and said they wanted some strong people for casual labour, bricking and that. They seemed to like me. The boss said he'd take me on so I was really glad. But what we basically did was go to another town in the boss's truck and then go from house to house offering to do things like lay driveways for cheap prices cash in hand.

'Thing is, the boss would set us to work and tell us we had to get the job done by a certain time. We weren't to speak to anyone or talk about the job – that's why I was useful. We had to work until dark and sleep in a garage. The boss took all the cash and gave us nothing except some food and cigarettes.

'When I tried to ask a householder for food and drink I got beaten by the boss, he slapped me and yelled at me. I work all day to lay the bricks really fast, but I get nothing. And now I am a long way from my home and I have nowhere else to go.'

And what about Guernsey? Historians have traditionally considered it unlikely that Guernsey merchants were ever involved in the slave trade. But the occupation of the Channel Islands during the Second World War saw many forced labourers, in effect slaves, brought here from eastern Europe.

It would be naïve to think that Guernsey is immune from some aspects of modern slavery today. A local charity, Abolitionist Guernsey, states that 'We do not know the nature and extent of slavery and trafficking in Guernsey, or if indeed, if it exists at all', but goes on to identify a number of risk areas. Articles on their website, [www.abolitionist.org.gg](http://www.abolitionist.org.gg), are well worth reading if you would like to know more.

Why am I telling you about this today? Simply because our gospel reading is the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan. Just as the priest and the Levite ignored the injured man on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, it is all too easy to close our eyes to the distasteful reality of modern slavery – if we are aware that it exists. The Clewer Initiative invites us to inform ourselves so that we can be alert to the signs of modern slavery – and pray and work for an end to this modern scourge. This is one of many ways in which we can demonstrate in this generation the timeless model of the Good Samaritan.

We need to hear again Jesus' call to bring freedom and end captivity. We, like our ancestors, can be part of bringing an end to slavery. We can pray for those trapped in slavery, for those exploiting them, and for the authorities who deal with these issues. We can support charities working with those who have been trafficked or enslaved. We can inform ourselves about the issue – for example, we can learn about the way slavery is included in the supply chains for our food and clothing. We can look out for the signs of those who are trapped in forced labour and report it to the Police: in the UK people are particularly asked to be alert to the labour-intensive hand car washes that spring up all over the country.

In all of this we can try to live out the message of Jesus that freedom is a sign of God's kingdom. This is part of what we mean when we pray the Lord's Prayer, 'Thy Kingdom come'.