



**Sunday, 18 August 2019 – Trinity 9**  
**Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey**  
**Readings: Jeremiah 23: 23-29 & Gospel St Luke 12: 49-56**  
**Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard**

In an idle moment the other day, I watched a fashion film that featured the rise and fall of women's hemlines over the decades. Beginning in the 1900s with ankle-length skirts, subsequent hemlines alternated each decade up and down and by the 1960s, up even higher. Who could forget the first appearance of the mini skirt or 'pelmet' the shorter they became? The film concluded in the present time with these salutary remarks "Maybe it is a reflection on the current global political climate but never have hemlines been so long since *The Great Depression*."

That led me off at a tangent to reflect that the Church too goes through phases. At one time a penitent heart could do no better than turn to the *Book for Common Prayer* to provide words in the most thoughtfully written English. Then, sometime in the 1970s, it became unfashionable for preachers to mention the 'wiles of the devil' and the pressing need to be on our guard. Newer liturgy was introduced with a softer approach to repentance. Today, times have moved on even further and you can take your pick of crazy golf at Rochester Cathedral or the Helter Skelter at Norwich Cathedral!

Jesus, the Word made flesh, certainly came with the aim of making faith accessible for all yet in doing so he did not dilute his message: what he said was honest, had integrity and applicability for every generation. Let's review the two bible readings for further thoughts.

Poor Jeremiah's name has become a by-word for all things depressing, so gloomy are his writings. He, though, has the courage of his convictions to put his finger on the pulse of his own nation and finds it to be out of kilter with the heart of God. The false prophets claim divine insight but preach their own Gospel. Wrong, says God, the only way to live righteously is to speak my word faithfully. I'm not hiding myself, I'm here, ready, willing and available for all who seek me. But if you ignore me, you will discover that "My word is like fire ...and a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces."

God does not mince his words. He means he will burn out corruption and break the arrogance of those who should know better. By their misdirection they will bring calamity on all in the community, the guilty and on the innocent and powerless. Jesus amplifies this point in the Gospel saying: "I came to bring fire to the earth." This is the purifying, refining fire of the Holy Spirit sifting out the sinful and supporting the faithful. Although Jesus uttered his words over 2,000 years ago, they are as honest and as relevant for our life and times as ever. He warns that if we seek to follow him faithfully there will be consequences. It will lead us into conflict with those who see no need of God. It may even cause conflict within our own families, where one generation sees things differently to another.

The great value of coming to church; the value of well written liturgy; the value of being together in community is that we stop; we are no longer on send but receive. Together we pause to hear God's words speak to us directly. And listening, we may better discern the difference between opinionated, skewed views splashed across the media compared with the benchmarks of the Eternal Word who is the Way, the Truth and the life to our salvation.

To be a Christian in any generation takes courage to stand up for what we believe. Our readings today urge us to do just that because if we don't stand up for what is righteous, we may well fall for anything.

Argumentative, militant behaviour may be the way of vociferous activists: we need only turn on the television to see who is championing the latest cause, be it *Extinction Rebellion* or the on-going democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong. Even if their cause is just and well intentioned, coercive behaviour is seldom the best means of reaching harmonious accord. Too often the innocent and vulnerable are caught helplessly in the cross-fire. By contrast, faithful Christians are not banging their own drum but stand on the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ. We can leave God, in his mercy, to be the judge of all.

Believe in the world and it will keep moving away from us. Believe in God and he'll keep moving towards us, each step of the way.

All that I have tried to convey in this sermon is far better expressed in the uplifting words of our recessional hymn, which by happy coincidence Chris has chosen for this morning. When we come to sing it, it is my prayer that we too can stand firm and sing with heart and soul "All my hope on God is founded: it concludes, "Christ doth call one and all: ye who follow shall not fall.

Amen.