

## Sermon Notes from 10 am service 31 January 2010

### Homelessness Sunday 31 January 2010 – reflection.

Passages Jeremiah 1, 4-5; Luke 4, 21-30.

The Word of God is unchanging. So the Word of God to Jeremiah is also the Word of God to us. It is uncomfortable and challenging; it calls us to take on a prophetic role which always invites opposition:

See, I put my words into your mouth. This day I give you authority over nations and kingdoms to uproot and pull down, to destroy and to demolish, to build and to plant.

We experience for ourselves the challenge of the Word of God when we identify ourselves with the mission and objective of Jesus – the mission which he described in the words of Isaiah:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me:  
He has sent me to announce good news to the poor,  
To proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind;  
To let the broken victims go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Today is homelessness Sunday. We have already identified ourselves with the situation and desperate need of homeless men and women, who live on the streets of Kingston. We have done our best to alleviate their problems temporarily by joining with other churches to provide overnight shelter and meals in the harshest winter months. But it is appalling that we should need to do this. It is appalling that our borough does not provide even the basic necessity of a roof for people who find themselves without one. I regard the presence of

homeless men and women on our streets as a prophetic sign from God against the values of our society. The response of the Church must be in accordance with the nature and stature of Christ: we must,

- bind up wounds
- take on ourselves the role of prophets
- allow our personal commitment to become professional and political

Binding up wounds is important in itself, but also because people will take what we say much more seriously if at the same time we are seen to be doing solid work. But it is not enough. If the Church is to avoid merely being a mild ameliorating influence on the worst consequences of the amoral and destructive processes now at work in our public life, we have to take on a prophetic role. We have to accept the authority which God gave to Jeremiah, 'to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to demolish, to plant and to build'. The danger for the Church is always that we accept pagan agendas and try and make them less oppressive, rather than challenging those agendas and trying to replace them with the vision and values of Christ.

So our personal commitment has to become professional and political. It is simply unacceptable that there is no provision in Kingston for emergency overnight shelter for homeless men and women. We have two organisations, Kingston Churches Housing Association and Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness which with borough support could provide emergency shelter for homeless people. KCHA can provide the house and KCAH can manage it, both with the aid of public grants. There may be some financial risk involved. This week, one of our long standing friends, Isabel Kenrick, died: she was the wife and partner of Bruce Kenrick, the URC Minister who raised money to set up the Notting Hill Housing Trust (and later SHELTER), and they pledged their own house as security. Their life and work is a sign of what can be achieved when

we take on a prophetic role, and allow that role to challenge the roots of society injustice.

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**Cameos of the life experiences of some of the guests who participated in our church's contribution to the winter night shelter.**

Before I begin to reflect upon the experiences of some people who have recently been homeless I ask that we first reflect upon the courage of all who are participating in the project and to respect their humanity. We all have stories to tell but I wonder how we might feel if we heard others telling some part of our history. Each person is much, much greater than this difficult time in their life. I did not ask our guests how they became homeless. Some wanted to tell but some did not. The project continues and although we are not offering support on Saturdays nights some of the guests use the foyer.

**Story One**

A man in his fifties has decided to leave his country and travel with some people who have promised him work in a new country. When he gets to London and steps out of the minivan that he has travelled part or all, of his journey in he is abandoned. There is no job and there is no place to stay. He is picked up by the police who have heard of the project and they help him get to the KCAH office. He does not speak English. He is always polite and grateful for this simple level of care that the winter nights shelter is offering. I wonder what picture he is getting of this country where cruelty and kindness have sat so close together for him in a short space of time.

## **Story Two**

A local man who has a brother and sister that live in different parts of the country is homeless. He has been homeless for a while. His mother is currently very ill. She has been in hospital and is now at home receiving high levels of pain relief. He is her nearest relative. Their relationship is not easy and there are times when it is very unpleasant. During the day he is cold and by participating in the project he must conform to the time restraints that are part of his contract of participation. If he is not visiting his mum he has nowhere to go. He is thankful of the relative comforts of the night shelter. He has no stability in his life. He would like to feel more resourceful. He knows that KCAH are working hard to help him.

## **Story Three**

A local man joined the shelter from his release from prison. His release was delayed and his financial support had not been sorted out. He is awaiting this and once he is in receipt of it he will hopefully be able to find a place to live. KCAH will help him. Whilst he was in prison he started a course and he is hoping to continue this, once he has an address. He cannot enrol until he achieves this. He is resourceful and knows about empty time and how to fill it. He has some hope for his own future. He, too, appreciates what the project has been able to offer him and although he must have struggled with rules he conforms to those of the shelter.