

Devotional Blog: Sunday 31st January

It was only a few minutes after his Inauguration as the 46th President of the United States that Joe Biden was sitting at the resolute desk in the Oval Office signing off some 17 Executive orders. The new Commander in Chief set out his stall in several ways. In the days prior to the Inauguration, he had been assembling his team. Then came the day when the work started. He needed to move swiftly on issues that called out for change. It was vital that he backed up the noble words of his acceptance speech. The people must know that he means what he powerfully has said to them. They must comprehend his beliefs, his identity, his way of getting things done for the good of all.

Biden had already made a significant point on the very morning he became President. Before all the ceremony of the Inauguration, he made an early morning visit to somewhere that is so important to him. He went to Mass at St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington D.C. He's gone to Mass all his life, even in the midst of heart-breaking family bereavements. He didn't require tear gas to get there, and he didn't pose outside brandishing a Bible for a photo op. No, he went inside to worship God. It tells us all so much about who he really is.

I wonder if the President knew that he was following a pattern that is set down in that pacey Gospel of Mark (Mark 1:21-28).

Mark tells the story with his typical immediacy. Jesus has called his team and does what he has always done on the Sabbath; he has gone to worship at the Synagogue. That morning in Capernaum he gets the teaching slot, and he knocks their ears off! The crowd is amazed at the sheer power and authority with which he speaks and teaches. His team of disciples and the public are getting a clear idea of what he is all about. And then, the chance for action, to put the

powerful words into visible meaning. Jesus performs an exorcism on a man in the Synagogue.

It's as if the spirit that possessed the man recognises Jesus as the Holy of God, before leaving the man at Jesus' command. The congregation is stunned. Amazing words and dramatic action. What sort of guy is this? Even without social media Jesus' fame flies around the region of Galilee.

Now Brothers and Sisters, we may not get to high office like Joe Biden, but we are to continue Jesus' Capernaum approach. Yes, we are to talk the talk and walk the walk. Words and action.

Speaking out about your faith is essential. There is spiritual thirst all around us. What you say in conversation, on the phone, in your text messages, and emails go to heal, build up, and love those in need of Christ in their lives.

God probably won't want you to perform an exorcism in Sainsburys, but he does want you to act in his name. It may be that the Holy Spirit will empower you to do something grand but it's likely that you are needed to donate some time, some kindness, some compassion to someone in need.

Let's pray as individuals and as a church family that we will recognise the opportunity to speak and act, even if it is costly.

So, our prayer is for courage to act out our faith, to challenge injustice and to bring love to others. In the words of poet Amanda Gorman: "There is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it, if only we're brave enough to be it."

Mark Gilks

Hampton Mission Partnership