

Come Holy Spirit. Anoint our hearts, and my lips, that we may proclaim your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A week is a long time in politics, they say, and this week has seen the world shift on its axis, as the result of a man who used words to bring harm.

For over 10 years, Donald Trump has used social media to say whatever he liked, whenever he felt like it, without fear of consequence, regardless of fact or fiction, always driven by the need to be heard, to be noticed, to be the centre of attention.

His freedom of speech has come at a very, very high price: a country deeply divided by race and political ideology. The rise of conspiracy theorists has created a dangerous, and well-armed, militia of domestic terrorists, within a country who generally believed that Trump was sent by God.

As the shocking news story of the storming of the Capitol building, the heart of American government, was stormed on Wednesday night, the world looked on in horror and disbelief, that the escalating rhetoric could have led to this moment. It was words used for division, which in turn resulted in death and mayhem.

Words are powerful. Used wisely they can inspire - bring healing and hope. Used badly they bring pain and division, hurt and destruction. We all use words. We are all affected, and all affect, other people by what we say, how we say it, and when we say it. We all have power because we all speak words.

Today we hear the words of a father, spoken in love towards his son. They are beautiful, perfect, uncompromising. When Jesus stepped into the waters of the Jordan ready to be baptised, it was a man who knew what it was to be one of us.

At Christmas we celebrated the moment he came to earth as a baby: a remarkable moment of love, of trust, by God, and Jesus, to give up the power of creation in order to be protected by a woman and a man, Mary and Joseph.

It was an act of love towards humanity beyond our comprehension, for both God and his son, but thirty years later Jesus had another choice. He had lived every day, for thirty years, with the vulnerabilities of his humanity, alongside the mess of family life, the muck and bullets of running a small business, dealing with customers some pleasant, some less so; watched neighbours argue and celebrate; had moments of great joy and times of great sadness. Like everyone else he had worked to put food on the table for his family, had to find money to pay taxes, to keep a roof over their heads. He knew the pressure of living everyday normal life, the same pressure we all feel every single day of the lives that we lead.

In essence, over 30 years, he would have experienced the very best and the very worst of humanity. And it was in this lived experience that he was now making the decision to begin his public ministry, fully in the knowledge of the hardships that he would have to endure: a conscious act of intentional love as he stepped into the water.

And then God, could no longer hold his peace as Jesus emerged, as his love overflowed. "You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased". What son would not delight in those words?

And the spirit appeared like a crown above his head, dancing with joy and delight: a moment of perfect unity, love and joy, spoken from love to love. God's delight in his son, and his son's delight in his father, was because together, with the Holy Spirit, they were unified in their love for all humanity, and in the actions that would result, in each one of us being invited into that family.

From that moment forward, Jesus would show us the way to the father, a journey that would love the poor, the weak, the stranger, the outcast; that would confront injustice and speak against those who abused their power over others/

Jesus' love was for all humanity and that meant he challenged injustice and spoke up for the weak. We are called to do the same.

In love we are called to use our voices, to praise God, to bless his name, to speak words of hope and faith, to stand against oppression, to recognise the absolute core essential that we are all made in the image of God. Any political or social economic movement, that creates division and devalues any part of humanity, is not part of God's plan, and those who claim God for their side, but do not know love, will always be wrong.

We are called to speak against anyone, or any institution, that seeks division and injustice because God loves deeply all humanity and all creation. Everyone and everything matters. Our words are powerful, whether spoken at home or outside, at work or in our communities, on social media or on the telephone; everything we say, and how we say it, carries weight and meaning. We all have a responsibility. Our words spoken in love can build people up, and the communities we are part of. We can choose to speak words of hope, and encouragement, to cherish each other even when we are hurting inside. We can choose what we say to others, and I know that that is hard.

I have often been struck by the fact that no matter how bad things got for Jesus, and they did get really bad, he never lashed out with mean, spiteful, petty, or barbed comments.

I believe it was because the love in his heart guided his words no matter how painful things were.

Kind words really can transform our relationships. They can lift our spirits and give us hope to face another day, when the going gets tough. This week I received an email from a friend in the cathedral congregation. The words were kind; they were uplifting caring and affirming. Unbeknown to them I was feeling weary and sad, by many things that were weighing me down. As I read the email, those words spoke deeply to my soul; they brought healing and hope. Through the words I heard God and was reminded of his love for me.

We need to be better at being kind. We need to be better at using our voices to build one another up in love, and we need to be better at speaking out against those in our world who seek to divide and bring pain.

And in this dark season, possibly the most challenging time of our communal lives, with a pandemic, with loneliness and fear, so many job losses, so many things bearing down upon all of us, now more than ever we have to set the tempo. We have to be the ones who speak from a place of love, to build bridges to be kind and gentle, to be the ones who speak of hope, because the times are dark. We need to use our voices to bring light.

As we channel God's love, through the words on our lips, we can also hear God's words to us:

"You are my child, my beloved", because that is what he speaks in our ears when we speak love into this world. Amen.