Sunday 19th December 2021: Advent IV

The Priest Pastor

See it, Say it, Sorted.

Ever since I began commuting, I have wanted to write a sermon based on the ubiquitous security announcement from TFL. See it, say it, sorted. Slightly dubious grammar. Broadcast by many different voices thousands of times each day, urging people travelling on public transport to be alert, to say if they see anything out of the ordinary, so that something can be sorted. So that evil can be averted. We, the travelling public are urged to have our eyes open, to see something that requires our cooperation, and to speak out. Then action can be taken that may be life changing, that might prevent injury or death. See it. Say it. Sorted.

And today I have found the perfect application. It all boils down to a young woman living in obscurity, who sees God’s messenger and says ‘yes’ to a call! That changes everything, for the world and for us. She sees it, she says it, God sorts it. More of that later.

But first, I wonder if you have ever watched X factor? What I like about talent shows like X factor is the moment when a rather unlikely person comes on stage. Everyone rolls their eyes, and thinks this is going to be awful. But they open their mouth and sing like an angel. Remember Susan Boyle? One of the most imitated parts of that formula is the voting: the contestant needs a majority Yes vote, and when the outcome is uncertain, there is that delicious moment when the final judge hovers....tense music plays, everyone holds their breath.....I’m going to say........YES! Usually followed by complete hysteria!
The dream is, of course that that YES is going to change someone’s life, someone who has up to that point has been working on the check out, or on the bins. And for some people it will profoundly change their life. Whether or not they achieve a career in music, they have been affirmed; they have communicated with the judges and the audience; something has been recognised and valued.

I was thinking about X Factor as I thought about this morning’s sermon. How hard it is to say Yes to God. Much easier to say, ‘not at the moment’, or ‘don’t bother me’. As St Augustine said ‘Lord make me perfect, but not yet’. We Christians love all the paraphernalia of saying yes to God, the hymns, the praise, the testifying, the holy books and pictures, the liturgy and music, the eucharist even.

We find it harder when we hear that still small voice urging us to do something that is going to put us out. When the voice of God challenges our ego, questions the way we treat others. Suggests we admit our mistakes, and apologise to others. When that still small voice calls us to give up something we cling to unhealthily, when it calls us to practice self control when it comes to the little obsessions and selfish acts that are so tempting. When the voice of God calls us to make time to pray and to listen. To take risks for him. To give sacrificially. Then the Yes that has seemed so attractive in theory turns into procrastination, defiance or complacency. We can say one thing with our lips but there is a disconnect with what we do. We talk the talk but don’t walk the walk.

Jesus warned in Matthew’s gospel ‘Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven but the one who does the will of my Father’ So its not just about what we say. That doesn’t sort it.

On this fourth Sunday in Advent we celebrate the Blessed Virgin Mary, a woman who said an almighty Yes to God, who put her trust in him for a future that tested her to the limit. Her yes was not empty affirmation, but a yes of body, mind and spirit, blood and flesh, pain and endurance. Her yes to God utterly changed human existence. Everything from the beginning of God’s revelation led up to her mighty Yes and flowed from it. It is Mary’s ‘yes’ that gives us Jesus our saviour, our redemption, our faith. Without her, there would be no Christmas. See it, say it, sorted. She saw Gabriel, she said yes, the incarnation was sorted. In this, she mirrored the divine plan. God saw our need. He spoke, through the word made flesh. Our salvation was sorted.
Today’s gospel shows the joy of another woman recognising the power of that ‘yes’. Elizabeth sees the mother of her Lord. Her body leaps in recognition. She is filled with the Holy Spirit. She sees it; she says it. ‘Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.’ ‘Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord’.

As we contemplate Christmas, and our response to this great mystery of the incarnation it is as if we are Simon Cowell and God is on the stage. The question comes from the Lord. Are you going to say yes to me? This Christmas? This day? This hour? What will your answer be, Yes, or No? As the tense music plays, and angels in heaven wait with bated breath, let Mary be our inspiration, as with God’s help we reply Yes!. Yes! with all our heart, mind and spirit and strength. Yes! with body and soul, with joy and hope. See it, say it, sorted.