

Dame Vera & the Prophet Jeremiah - Trinity 3 28th June 2020

28 th June Trinity 3 What we should have had	9.30 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 28 vv 5-9 p788 Romans 6 vv 12-23 p1133 Matthew 10 vv 40-42 p976	A&M 203 O Praise Ye the Lord 99 O God our Help 515 There's a Spirit 219 Soldiers of Christ 421 Strengthen for Service
28 th June Trinity 3 What we should have had	11.00 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 28 vv 5-9 p788 Romans 6 vv 12-23 p1133 Matthew 10 vv 40-42 p976	HHT 9 Awake, Awake 45 Jesus Good Above All 23 Father, Lord of All 20 Eternal Ruler 34 God of Grace 89 Tell Out My Soul

O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom thou hast given an hearty desire to pray, may by thy mighty aid be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The death of Dame Vera Lynn on 18th June at the age of 103 affected a lot of people, including many of us who are too young to remember her in her heyday. In 2000 she was named the Briton who best exemplified the spirit of the 20th century. It is hard to put into words what she meant to so many people. She epitomised the innocent love of family and sweethearts. Her songs broadcast to troops serving overseas were a powerful emotional link with home. In her radio programme, *Sincerely Yours*, she broadcast messages to servicemen and women serving abroad – including the births of children broadcast while on her visits to maternity wards. Dame Vera herself travelled with ENSA (The Entertainments National Service Association) to perform where British troops were serving in Egypt, India and Burma, at some risk to herself. In honour of this, she was awarded the Burma Star in 1987. At home, Vera sang in air raid shelters, tube stations and factories, as well as on the radio and in concert halls. Her songs and the voice in which she sang them conveyed both love and hope at a time when the nation was passing through dark days in a just war against powerful forces. Vera and her music had a powerfully unifying effect on our country. She had a long post-war career and it is unsurprising that her songs have again come to the fore both at the various Second World War commemorations held over the years since 1945, not least last May 8th, and in this current COVID 19 crisis.

Dame Vera Lynn (unlike some public entertainers) was *Sincerely Yours*. She came to regard those serving in the armed forces as family. She generously and selflessly supported armed forces charities after the war and charities connected with cerebral palsy and breast cancer.

She was genuinely a nice person and she received and delivered the word that was needed in wartime Britain – a message of love and hope. I do not know what her religious beliefs were and I am not claiming her as a Christian prophet, but that does not mean that God could not use her as He has used many others to accomplish His purposes. Dame Vera told an enquirer once that she did not know whether we'll meet again after death, though she felt that surely there must be something. Now she knows.

While Dame Vera is deservedly popular, the prophet Jeremiah (who certainly was a prophet in every sense of the word) was much less respected in his own time by his own people,

though he was very far from deserving his unpopularity. He loved his nation, sacrificed his own safety and well-being for them and remained faithful to the people and to God even when the people turned against him and God seemed far away. Jeremiah had a message, a word from God, which was much less congenial to the hearers than Dame Vera's was to us. The people of Judah were caught up in a terrible war with the ruthless Babylonian Empire, but far from being able to offer his people hope, Jeremiah's message from God was that they had brought the war on themselves by their rejection of God and their violent, dishonest and oppressive behaviour towards their fellow human beings. They deserved to lose to the Babylonians and that was exactly what was going to happen. Their only hope would be to return to God and, at the very end when everything else had proved hopeless, to cast themselves on the mercy of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar.

Dame Vera a sort of prophet with a popular message, the prophet Jeremiah with an unpopular word from the LORD. What matters is not whether the messenger or prophet is popular. What matters is that the word is true. In today's OT reading, Hananiah was a false prophet, bringing a comforting, but untrue message. Hananiah's false comfort could only make the situation worse because those who paid attention to him wouldn't then take the measures necessary to bring their troubles to an end, repentance towards God and a recognition that resistance to the Babylonians really was futile and that, unpalatable as it might seem, surrender was the only realistic path to peace. Dame Vera's message of love and hope helped to sustain our nation in its darkest hour. Hananiah's message of false hope and defiance quite probably unnecessarily prolonged a futile conflict and got in the way of Jeremiah's true word from the LORD which was that the only hope was to return to God and to sue for peace.

There's a lot of talk about fake news today. How do we decide what is genuine? How do we recognise the truth? How do we know what God is really saying to us? We start from our relationship with God, what we know of Him already. He makes Himself known to us in our hearts, through friends and family, in the wonders of nature, in the fellowship of the Church, in the Sacraments, through the pages of the Bible and in Christian teaching down through the ages. He gives us hearts, souls, minds and strength. We are to use all these as we seek to discern His Will: conscience, common sense, what we have been taught, what we have learnt by ourselves. Above all, God makes Himself known in Jesus. It is in what we already know of God that we can seek to discern what He is saying to us today, to weigh and to judge the words of those who claim to speak on His behalf. We approach this task of discernment with all due humility. We can only ever know a fraction of the truth here on earth, but we do know that God is love. What is of love is of God. What is not of love is not of God.

I John 4: ⁷ Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. ⁸ He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. ⁹ In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. ¹⁰ Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. ¹² No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. ¹³ Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.