

In his book 'After Virtue', the theologian Alastair MacIntyre says this: 'Power co-opts. And absolute power co-opts absolutely'. An unusual riff on a well-known saying but one that captures well the way that power works in our world. If you want an example of this from the last month listen to the words of Mike Mulvaney, acting chief of staff to Donald Trump, who on confirming that Trump withheld military aid to Ukraine in order to pressurise an investigation by that country's government into Trump's political opponents said 'We do that all the time with foreign policy. Get over it.'

The powers of this world tell us 'this is how things are, this is the way they have to be, get over it', seeking to co-opt us into believing that there is no alternative, that unfortunately the cries and needs and hopes of the poor, the marginalised, the oppressed, the violated cannot be heeded, however desirable that might seem to be. 'Omelettes cannot be made without breaking eggs' said one powerful proponent of this way of thinking. Get over it.

The work of the prophets is to stand up to such words for the illusion they are, to point out the self interest of power and to proclaim that other realities, which honour the powerless, are entirely possible. This is what Jesus is about in the reading we heard.

Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem to the acclaim of the crowd, surely in his own bid for power. The people spread their very clothes before him as he rides into the city on a colt. 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!' they shout. What will Jesus do? Take power? Proclaim his rule? Put down his foes? Promote his friends? Start telling people how it's going to be under his terms?

Jesus offers no such words. Instead he offers his tears. In lament Jesus cries out over the ways of the city that stands before him. He cries out at the ways that have not benefited the many but the few. He cries out that this city is not about peace, respect, dignity, value for all. He cries out that it is set on a collision course with destruction.

Jesus starts where the prophets always begin. In grief, in sorrow, in tears at what stands before them. A grief that cannot be hushed up or explained away. Sorrow that's not amenable to being told 'this is the way it has to be'. Lament that can't be told 'Get over it.'

For it's only out of such lament that any imagination for a new and different future can be borne. Only when we've really grieved for what is can we begin to imagine what can be. It's only when he's gazed into the abyss that a prophet like Isaiah can offer the prospect of a very different future, where swords are reimagined as ploughshares, spears as pruning hooks.

We can't lament, we can't imagine if we can't first hear. Hear from the silenced, the spoken over, the hushed, the ignored. That's what our evening later is going to be all about. To listen at first hand from Terry and Andrew and Mariam of those who would otherwise be silent to us. To listen to them. To lament with them. To begin to imagine a different world with them. To listen is the first step on our journey of being numbered among the prophets. To live out what it means to be a society that promotes a truly Christian knowledge of the world. It's good to be here. Amen.