

4th Sunday 2009

I imagine you all heard President Obama's inauguration speech. Were you hanging on his every word? Were you spell bound? Were you in awe of this person who has come so far despite all the prejudices in our country? What were you hoping to hear? And did you hear it? What did you feel when you heard the words?

This is the price and promise of our citizenship. This is the source of our confidence – the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny. This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed- why men and women of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent mall and why a man whose father less than sixty years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath.

I heard Obama's speech in another country, not our own. I heard it in Jamaica in a school in West Kingston, St Anne's primary. I heard it in a context of poverty where children are crowded in classrooms with few resources. Where teachers face the almost impossible task of educating children who live with the chaos of violence in the streets and whose homes are one room, sheet metal roofed dwellings. Who are lucky to have one living parent and most likely have many, many brothers and sisters. But there, too in Jamaica, in west Kingston in one of the poorest neighborhoods people were riveted to the screen, listening attentively to a new American president whose skin color was the same as theirs, looking to this man to give them hope, to give them a brighter future even though America was to them a far distant land. What hope was instilled in them hearing these words?

To the people of poor nations we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow, to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry mouths.

I can't imagine how moving it was for those of you who were there in DC, who had traveled there to be part of this "unimaginable" moment in time. But there we all were, hoping and praying that the words Barack Obama spoke would inaugurate a new way of being American in our world.

America, in the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave

once more the icy currents, and endure whatever storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn our back nor did we falter and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried for the that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations.

And how many skeptics were there listening to the speech. How many nay-sayers. How many who would actively work against the dream and the vision. How many hearts were hardened among the millions and millions of people across the world who would choose not to believe that change was possible in our country and our world. How many demonic voices would cry out, "No!"

And now imagine a meeting room, a synagogue in the fishing town of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. A meeting room not much larger than St Mary of the Angels, or St Annes' church in Kingston Jamaica. The Rabbi, from Nazareth takes his place in the assembly and begins to teach. What did those people hear? How were they moved, inspired. What was the unimaginable moment like for them. For this was Jesus of Nazareth's inauguration speech. Mark doesn't tell us what Jesus said but he does give us the reaction of the people who hear this Jesus. In Luke's version of this story, he has Jesus quoting Isaiah, the messianic text. The spirit of the lord is upon me for he has anointed me. To bring good news to the poor... and announce a time of favor. And Jesus' short homily is, Today this word is fulfilled in your midst. Jesus' inauguration speech makes the claim that God is working, moving, healing, restoring, reconciling...doing everything that God has ever promised to do in Jesus.

And Mark gives us the reaction. Most people were spellbound, astonished, couldn't believe their ears. He speaks with authority, with originality and not the same old same old. Not as the scribes who simply tell us what to believe and how to live. This Teacher is saying something altogether new about God. God's right here in our midst, in our brokenness, in our hopes and dreams and visions.

But right from the beginning of his ministry there are voices of opposition. "What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth? I know who you are. You are the Holy One of God." The power and possibility of change, of God's claim on each and every person for the kingdom evokes the demonic response, the No to God's Holy One that echoes through the centuries with

the imprisonment of the human spirit in slavery and holocaust and genocide, and every sort of evil that human beings are capable of.

But Jesus, the Rabbi, the teacher, the Holy One of God has God's spirit, God's power, God's life, God's presence within him. He exorcises the demon, restoring the possessed man to wholeness and health. And that is what he can do for each and every one of us. God's Holy One, God's chosen, God's healing power in our world can deliver us from whatever demons possess us --- if we let him, if we surrender to his power and his grace.

I hope and pray that president Obama's vision for our country will be a reality. But as we well know, there is no guarantee that any leader's inaugural vision and campaign promised will be fulfilled. But with Jesus we are already there.