

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Trinity 2020**

*<sup>5</sup> Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord. <sup>6</sup> He said, 'Amen! May the Lord do so! May the Lord fulfil the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the Lord's house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. <sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: <sup>8</sup> from early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. <sup>9</sup> But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognised as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true.'* (Jeremiah 28:5-9)

'Listen to the scientists' was what Greta Thunberg said to Congress, less than a year ago. 'Is the government listening to the scientists?' has been a constant headline in our newspapers since we first recognised that coronavirus was sweeping the world. These days we look to scientists for predictions of what might happen to our world in the future. We feel that we can trust the science for guidance on how to manage our communities so that we can prevent disaster happening. If disaster then happens turning to the scientists for ways to mitigate the effects seems, for most of us, a sensible thing to do.

So in many ways, the scientists of today sound very similar to the prophets of Jeremiah's time. The difficulty was that different prophets would come out with contradictory messages. Not that that doesn't happen with scientists but with the right information we can weigh up the validity of the science. It was more difficult to test a prophecy, at least, not until after the event. So when Jeremiah and Hananiah presented the king of Judah and other local kings with very different plans of action, how were they going to recognise what they should really be doing. Jeremiah said that God's will was to submit to Nebuchadnezzar and the power of Babylon while Hananiah was urging the kings to fight back.

For the aggressive kings, Hananiah's approach was much more up their street – they liked to think they had power. But Hananiah was different from Jeremiah. Jeremiah's prophecy actually came from God. The role of the true prophet was to lead the community closer to God, and, as Jeremiah said, the only way of knowing whether someone was really a prophet was when their predictions came to fruition. It would only be then that God's power could be seen and that the community would understand that the message came from God.

Over the last few months we've heard the politicians, we've heard the scientists and we've heard goodness knows how many journalists give their opinion. I've no doubt we've all had moments when we've wondered what's right and what isn't as we gather contradictory views from the media. But all those politicians, scientists and journalists are not prophets. Their words don't come from God. The question then is whether we can take a step back and hear the voice of God. We might not have dramatic prophets like Jeremiah but we do still have our Bibles as well as the hymns and prayers both of today and of centuries gone by. As they speak to us of the peace which God offers I hope we can find the confidence to trust that, whatever we might experience during this strange time, we will emerge cherished by love and strengthened in faith. Amen