

Mayor's Civic Service 2016 (25.09.16)

Amos 6: 1, 4 – 7; Luke 16: 19 – end

We gather here today to celebrate the Mayor of Bridlington's Civic Service and to give thanks to almighty God for Cllr Liam Dealtry's tenure of that office. So what we do is: we think of Cllr Dealtry and we bring to mind all the good things about him. Luckily I know Liam likes short sermons . . . so you're not going to be disappointed today!

Actually, I know that Liam would be the first to say that this is not really about him, the man Liam Dealtry, but about the office of the Mayor of Bridlington. But actually we do take the opportunity to pay public tribute to way Cllr Dealtry discharges the function of that office; for the unstinting way he promotes the profile of our town; and provides for us a focus of our identity and civic pride. Cllr Dealtry has the knack of investing the office of Mayor with dignity, but never taking himself too seriously. We thank you

for being an exemplary expression of all that it means to be Bridlington.

The office you hold serves as a prism through which the identity of our whole community is focused. So, as we celebrate the Mayor's Civic Service we give thanks to God for all sectors of our community; for all that's done by all our Bridlington Town Councillors; for all the services provided by the East Riding of Yorkshire Council; for all who lead and teach and work in our schools; for our doctors and nurses and health visitors . . . and yes, alright, for our podiatrists as well; for all who invest money and take entrepreneurial risks for Brid, who run guest houses and cafes and restaurants and shops; and for all who support the vulnerable and lonely in our community: people like the Hinge Project, the Kingfisher Café, the CAB and the Salvation Army.

As we give thanks in the context of Christian worship, we pray for our town; that it may continue to thrive on

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the standards and values of the Christian faith, the sort of values we've heard about in the Bible readings today, the sort of values that say that everybody is acceptable and everybody is accepted. Both Bible readings today are warnings to people who have the best wine and food and all the advantages going but don't care about folk who are left behind and struggle. The Bible speaks about people who lie on ivory couches and eat lambs from the flock. Today we might talk about fat cats and people on the gravy train. God says "I have a particular concern for people whose way of life is treated as expendable and whose voices are left unheard" and he wants people who love him to share that concern.

And that's the way it has seemed in Brid in recent decades, hasn't it? Towns like Brid have just seemed left behind. The school funding formula gives less money to secondary age children in the East Riding than to children in just about any other authority in England. Traditional ways of life have just

disappeared and nobody has seemed to care. The elites haven't listened; and people in places like Brid have felt trampled over and ignored. Rather like the man named Lazarus in the Bible story this morning who could do nothing but sit longingly at the gates of the rich man.

Well, on June 23rd this year, people in places like Brid did something about it. The establishment was given an almighty bloody nose. Averaged out across the country 52% voted for Brexit, but in Brid the mood felt pretty overwhelming. The potential problem, though, with any revolution – even one as quiet as not voting the way the establishment said we should – is that it ushers in an even greater tyranny. There is a vicious circle we can spiral down if we're not careful.

First of all we start thinking in terms of them and us. Then we think of ourselves as good and of them as being bad. Then we start blaming them for all the hardships we encounter. And then we start taking it

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out on them. And then, before we know where we are, another group of people is denigrated, marginalised, excluded and perhaps even exterminated. Of course it doesn't have to be like that, but the danger is that it can be. The Brexit vote has been followed by an alarming rise in hate crime. Vicious, ugly racism has been given a platform.

That does not mean that all folk who voted Brexit are racists. Of course they're not. Cllr Dealtry himself campaigned passionately to leave the EU. People who voted for Brexit are not all racists; but, you know, all racists are Brexiteers. The dilemma is that the unintended consequence of a marginalised and overlooked community like Brid finding its voice is that a voice has been given to xenophobia and racism as well. The problem is that it is difficult for people to stand up for themselves without excluding others. They seem to go hand in glove, even if that's not what you want.

The Christian faith is a tool that helps us to square that circle. Because God's love is for everybody . . . at the same time as being particular to each individual person. God has a particular concern, a bias if you like, towards communities like Brid. He gives dignity and has a special place in his purposes for people who are overlooked or left behind. People who are special to God are people who don't have money, who don't have power, who don't have influence and who don't have equal access to opportunities.

God's gift to his special people is love, not hatred; generous heartedness, not meanness; open-mindedness, not suspicion. Bridlington has traditionally been a place of hospitality and sanctuary. It has opened its homes and opened its hearts to tens of thousands of holiday makers every year not caring where they came from or what accent they spoke with. Its harbour has provided safe haven down the centuries to people who have been caught in rough seas. We must ensure that those values, the values

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that have sustained us, are not distorted and lost post-Brexit. Jesus stands amongst us today offering us his love and his dignity to work with Cllr Dealtry and all who stand behind him to make this not just a town that we can be proud of, but a town of whose generosity and hospitality, whose open-mindedness and outward-lookingness we can be proud of as well.

Amen.