







Within the United Reformed Church we have never been encouraged to withdraw from the world into some kind of holy ghetto. We have been urged to engage with issues such as Trade Justice, Commitment for Life, Stop the Traffik, Global warming. Local churches all over the country have been encouraged –with financial and professional help- to use their buildings and people for community projects that will make the lives of local people better. Working for justice, peace and the integrity of creation is one of our five marks of mission. We believe deeply and passionately in making the kingdom of God a living reality.

But I think that we have also come to realise that we cannot “conquer the world for Christ” unless we allow Christ to conquer us first. No matter how good or worthwhile the political and social projects in which we involve ourselves, they will come to nothing unless the enemies within ourselves are held up to God for conquest. That is what a lot of the current Vision4Life project is about. It is not just because the word “evangelism” scares the life out of most of us that it is left until last in the three-year programme. It is because we need to re-engage with the saving power of God-through the Bible and through prayer- and renew our own salvation before we can start trying to save the world.

The books of Joshua and Judges stand as a warning to take ourselves and our faults seriously. Not in terms of self-loathing and “I’m-a-hopeless-mess” which only leads to self-pity but in terms of facing the fact that there is evil in us, that we are capable of doing a great deal of harm and of sabotaging a great deal of good. It is not necessarily our fault- we are born with the propensity to mess things up- but the fact that is not entirely our fault does not mean that it is not our responsibility. We are all lethal weapons and we need to face up to this fact if we are ever to achieve any good.

The books of Joshua and Judges are a warning to take evil seriously. Don’t pretend it does not exist. Don’t fool yourselves that it is something easily dealt with. Don’t think it is something with which you can dabble and then withdraw when you have had enough. Evil can take hold of you and take over your life before you are even aware of it. It can bring down a kingdom without anyone even raising the alarm.

But finally, the books of Joshua and Judges are an urgent message to take salvation seriously. There is power that is stronger than evil. There is power that can work miracles in human lives and nations. There is power to save us, each one of us, from the enemies within. And that is the power of God. Victor and Adolf Hitler may have believed that the only solution to the world’s problems lay in killing men and women. The Bible tells us that the only solution to the world’s problems lies in letting men and women live to know, to accept and to proclaim the power of God in their lives. Amen.