



The New Shofar

In Christ all enmity breaks down and we truly become One

January 23rd

Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets.

What are the great questions calling out for an answer from every human person on this earth? Some of those would sound like this... *Who are we? What is our fundamental problem? What is the solution to that problem? What is our primary moral duty? How should we live?* The answers to these have a significant impact on our lives in community and the wellbeing of the community itself. The Bible is very aware of this, which is why Jesus, as well as the prophets of the Hebrew Bible have been strident in their condemnation of those who proclaimed false prophecies. False promises and false world views.

Christianity provides us with an overarching story that runs from creation to redemption: We are creatures made in God's image, who have sinned against him, who need to be rescued through the atoning work of Jesus, and who are called to love both God and neighbour.



Why is that? It is because for God there is only one reality in creation – it comes from the divine will, unfolds according to a divine plan and remains subject to God in the things that matter.

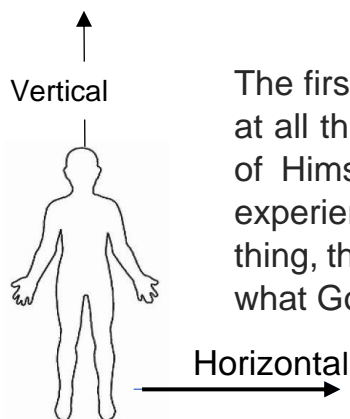
What is a false prophet? The false prophets of whom the Bible speaks are not those whose theology is a little bit questionable, people with whom we might argue and disagree. They do not just have a different view of the world. No. Biblical false prophets are, in the words of Jesus, *wolves in sheep's clothing*. **Matthew 7:15-20**....

¹⁵ 'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will know them by their fruits.

There is another false story going around the West today

We do have a significant challenge to the Good News of God's reign on earth in Jesus Christ. It comes from a different narrative to the one found in our scriptures. That story insists how men and women are primarily defined in terms of our relationship to each other, what they call a horizontal view. Christians, on the other

hand, following the revelations of God, understand all men and women to be defined by their relationship to the God who created them and the redeemed them. We are, and we remain always, the way God created us. Nothing, not even sin, can change that. It is a gift for life!



The first step for Christians, when looking at others, at the world, at all things is to explore it in the light of what God has revealed of Himself through the words of the Scriptures and the lived experiences of the faith community under the Holy Spirit. Is this thing, this way of thinking, this way of viewing the world in line with what God has said?

When Jesus met with the Pharisee Nicodemus one night, this was the message he was teaching. Unless you are born *from above* – that is, view what is happening from the perspective of the throne of God rather than from the mini-thrones of the world, you cannot have and will not know life. This is a major challenge for all of us.

Does any of this really matter?

Well, yes it is, mostly because so much of what we are told in the news outlets are filtered through world views that do not begin with God. They tell us how it is colour that is important when we look at others – white means privilege and being an oppressor while black means oppressed. Hence, Black Lives Matter. For us the starting point is not colour but being created *in the image and likeness of God*. That is why respect, and the valuing of life is extended to all people.

Similarly with the other “hot” area of debate and strife across the West – trans “rights”, gay “rights”, gender “rights” and so on. Here again we have a significant difference in the way we Christians begin our reflections. We start with God creating and God placing the man and the woman in the garden to continue the divine activity in the world. Our starting point is what God did and what God continues to do in and through the *man* and the *woman* today. The man and the woman blessed by God and declared to be “good”. That is the starting point in the message we have to contribute to these discussions.

And in all things love

What then happens when we come to applying this theology to people living in real situations is but the second step. Our starting point must always be God. And this is our gift to the world, a world so enthralled by the messages of the false prophets but disillusioned because their prophesies are not bearing the fruit they seek. Only God can do that, and God delivers through the scriptures and the Spirit at work in His Church, by the witness of those baptised into the Body of Christ.