

Fr Geoff Coupland – 8 February 2026 Sermon

May only your word be spoken here, O Lord, and only your word heard. In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Get comfortable. This is a long-y . You are the salt of the earth. You, you are the light of the world. Is it not ridiculously arrogant to think of ourselves as the salt of the earth and the light of the world? How can we measure the full meaning of that claim made for us by Christ?

Let us consider the society to which we have to give a savor. The world which we have to enlighten.

Our society is not Christian. Let's get that straight. Our society is not Christian. Now I'm not talking about you guys. We go to church. What I have in mind is the dynamic, the driving force behind what is happening. I am saying that what is going forward in the world today is not Christian. We are watching a process, the unfolding of purposes that are not in accord with Christian values. I hope that very few of us can disagree with that. Conservative Christians are only too ready to point to certain symptoms as indicative of a departure from Christian norms. Abortion. sexual promiscuity, divorce, pornography, euthanasia, at the least it could go on. The list is one-sided in its emphasis and two-limited in its range. more important. is to point out the various forms of greed and injustice. to poverty and unemployment, to torture and oppression, to the arms race which is claiming its places, to the destruction of the environment for short-term gains. Our society can hardly be described in traditional Christian terms as a faithful people serving God with a quiet mind.

So my next question What is the dynamic that is causing the restless destructiveness of our present world? For some reason I'd read too much and I think too much. Now this question has preoccupied a whole bunch of commentators and thinkers lately. Just go on Facebook, just go to the newspaper, just go. I mean, everybody has an opinion. I want to make two observations in my own simple way. What we are seeing is the result of a society in which all material business is governed by profit. not by the common good. It is not a question of trying to exclude self-interest, which will always have a prominent place in the work of this world. But what we are experiencing is the swapping of any consideration other than that of financial profit. The question is always and almost solely, what will sell? Not what is useful or valuable. Everything is measured in terms of money. Now you may want to disagree with me. I love to have arguments. Discussion is a good thing. in the long term, no one gains from the creation of poverty and the destruction of the environment. No one gains, but in the short term, Some people can gain

enormously in material prosperity by ignoring the welfare of others. and dismissing any concern for future generations.

I told you to get comfy. It's a long-y. And it's tough and I wrote it in 1987. Okay

Our society is being directed by those who are prepared to sacrifice everything for short-term gains. And many others follow their example for fear of being left behind. not many of us. And I include myself in this. have been able to resist the temptation to follow suit. despite the conflict with our Christian profession.

Most of us have to acknowledge our sin. Now, my other observation is this. Our society. has a will to power. Since the 17th century the West, now followed by the rest of the world, has been engaged in a scramble for power. Knowledge is conceived as power. It is a means of control. Calculation is exalted above contemplation. Manipulation above receptivity. Reason no longer means attention or openness towards the reality greater than me. But the bringing of reality into a subordination to me. so that it can serve the purposes of me. Reason becomes the creation of routines, through which the whole of reality takes the form of a huge machine under the direction of me. We are caught in a mechanical view of reality, in a delusion of the almighty power of me. and in the midst of progress.

So I go on to another question What is all this got to do with me? And you, just the average folks who come to church on Sunday, what does it got to do with us? How many of us, I wonder, have any part in determining the direction of our society?

We may truly apply to ourselves today what Paul said of the Christians at Corinth. For consider your call brothers and sisters Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards Not many were powerful Not many were of noble birth But God chose what is foolish in the world To shame the wise God chose what is weak in the world To shame the strong God chose what is low and despised in the world Even things that are not To bring to nothing things that are so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. But notice, Paul is not saying that we Christians do not have an important part to play in determining the course of this world. We do. We do. And he is telling us not to be deceived by appearances, into forgetting we are indeed instruments of the divine purpose.

So now I have to ask, as some of you are probably thinking, how then can we conceive our impact upon our society and the world? How do we do it? The key to understanding here is the disproportion that always exists between the trivial appearance and the spiritual reality of good and evil. Evil cloaks itself in triviality. Its appearance is banal. It is seemingly decent people who make the evil decisions that result in oppression and injustice, in exploitation, torture and war, in genocide and mass murder. and I have known many of them. As I shared with you once before, I came from a culture of privilege. to see evil as physically, visibly diabolical, as being the

work of easily recognizable villains like you see in the movies, is to retain a child's view. The real evil in our society is perpetrated by respectable citizens. Like you and me sometimes who have successfully smothered their own consciences. and beguiled others into accepting their behavior as merely, And God, I've heard it so many times, and so have you, merely realistic. Bull crap. The good is also frequently trivial in appearance. And this is where we come in. Paul lays down the principle, and you heard it in the epistle this morning, which is the point of my sermon all along. Paul lays down the principle that only the spiritual person can understand the thoughts of God. So also he writes, No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the Spirit of the world but the Spirit which is from God and we should never forget that. that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

Again, the unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God. for they are all folly to Him. And He is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. But it is perhaps a phrase of Isaiah That brings home to us the way in which immeasurable spiritual good may be hidden in seemingly trivial action You all still with me? Yeah, this is one of my better sermons Long, but one of my better ones.

urging us to a spiritual fast. which would consist in sharing our bread with the hungry. in bringing the homeless into our house. clothing the naked. Isaiah goes on to say, Have you heard it in the Old Testament lesson this morning? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn. Like the dawn. To do these works of mercy is the dawn of a new age.

the manifestation of the Spirit of God. And exaggeration? I get passionate about this kid, you tell? Can a few charitable deeds be the dawn of a new age?

Let us admit that some of us, or you can be a sav to our conscience in the context of a life of self-interest, but they can also be the stopping of ourselves of the whole dynamic of our present society. visibly trivial. Those actions can be the manifestation of a refusal to be governed solely by the pursuit of money. and the sign of a denial that me at the center is essentially unrelated to others. We are all connected. It is by no means a trivial matter. but it requires the power of the Spirit of God to bring to a halt the dynamism of society in each of our lives. I'm almost done. Certainly, as radical reformers and revolutionaries truly point out,

I always believed God was a woman.

It is not enough for us simply to be personally converted. The institutions of our society must be changed. And as all of us know, institutions are not changed overnight. cog theory. Remember cog theory Stan?

Nor is it enough. And this is really pertinent to today. Nor is it enough to simply destroy what exists. So I want you to think about that for a moment.

The direction of society must be turned around. And that must be done by us in the attitudes and actions of our life. Actions that seem to be trivial, maybe heavy with the weight of a new force. If enough of us in our congregations in America and around the world lived truly by our Christian values, and not simply by the values of this world, it would indeed be the dawn of a new age.

So In conclusion. Despite its horror, the crucifixion in the political and social context of its time was a trivial incident. Thousands under the Roman power had been crucified. It was not, however, spiritually trivial, as its subsequent transformation of the Roman world clearly showed, because it was, in effect, a rejection of the value system of the time. Jesus challenged the contemporary society and that is why he was put to death. One could say that the message of the crucifixion is that if you genuinely live according to the values of Christ, the world will put you to death. That's not a pretty picture. But I challenge you. Try living the Christian life without compromise. and see then whether what is asked of you is trivial. Jesus brushed history against the grain. It might be our task to do the same in our context.

Now I'm not naive and Neither are most of you as I've discovered We cannot avoid sharing the experience of our society to some extent. That's true. But I remind you I used to be told, Don't put your finger. I remind you, that experience in society is the experience of the absence of God. The feeling of absence is a result of the breakdown of our traditional symbols and the pressure on us to simply be an autonomous me. seeking freedom from traditional religious authority. But instead of that sense of absence Being experienced in a merely negative way As I've said more than once from pulpit here It can be transformed Into a sense of transcendence We can't change one bit of our past, but we can change the way we make sense of it. in the Spirit. But to do that, we must, and I'm looking in the mirror as such as I'm looking at you, we must live in our daily lives by a set of values different from those of many of our fellow citizens. rejecting simply the pursuit of money and the desire for power, reflecting on that a little bit. Isaiah tells us, and you heard it this morning again. Isaiah tells us that if we do so.

Then we can call and the Lord will answer. we will cry and he will say Here I am.

My god, I was long.