

## **Gunpowder, Treason and Plot – 6<sup>th</sup> November 2011. Rev Keith King**

**Remember, remember the fifth of November**

**Gunpowder, treason and plot.**

**I see no reason why gunpowder, treason**

**Should ever be forgot...**

I have very warm memories of ‘Guy Fawkes’ night in England when I was a child.

We would spend weeks collecting firewood for a huge bonfire in the garden. Mum and dad would buy fireworks and my brother and I would rake through wondering which would be the brightest and the loudest...

We would always make a ‘Guy’ and traipse it around the streets on a trolley collecting money to buy bangers and such that were never included in the box of fireworks that mum and dad bought.

On ‘Bonfire Night’ it would always be cold and wrapped in scarves and gloves we would ooh and aah at the fireworks, and enjoy the flames eating up poor old Guy who was perched on the top.

Potatoes were always baked in the embers which we would cut in half ladle with butter and eat with a teaspoon.

But I can think of lots of reasons why this particular event should be forgot.

It is of course a remembering of the attempt by the Catholic Guy Fawkes to assassinate the Protestant King James the First of England in 1605 so that he could be replaced with a Catholic head of state.

Had he succeeded not only would the King have been killed but most of the aristocracy and church hierarchy of the time would have gone up in smoke too.

As it was Guy Fawkes was hung drawn and quartered – a particularly grizzly execution and of course anti-catholic fervour reached fever pitch.

It was suggested that King James was saved by ‘Divine intervention’ and the ‘Observance of 5<sup>th</sup> November Act’ was passed later in 1605, commonly known

as the 'Thanksgiving Act' – indeed a new form of service was added to the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer for use on November 5<sup>th</sup>!

It was only just last week that it was agreed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting that the rules surrounding royal succession be changed to accommodate a Roman Catholic and to allow first born women to succeed to the throne before their male siblings.

The British Establishment and the Church of England have been a party to discrimination and sexism for centuries and of course in some areas continue to do so...

In New Zealand bonfires and Guy Fawkes dummies have largely disappeared but the use of fireworks still persists...

However in some quarters Guy Fawkes is taking on a new persona.

White caricature masks of Guy Fawkes have increasingly begun to appear at the 'Occupy Wall Street' protests which originated in the USA but have now spread across the globe.

This movement is a peaceful protest which seeks to challenge the vast worldwide income disparities and unbridled greed apparent since the 2008 global financial collapse.

This movement seeks to be the voice of the 99% who are lining the pockets of the 1% and it is gaining in momentum.

It is a movement that stands for the poor, the oppressed, the unemployed, the homeless, the hungry. It seeks to expose an economic system that favours the rich at the expense of the poor – and if this is not gospel stuff I do not know what is!

Ironically, or perhaps pathetically, parts of the C of E in England, rather than throwing its whole hearted support behind this movement now finds itself in antipathy to it.

The 'Occupy London Stock Exchange Movement' camped themselves on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral in London. Their presence began to affect the

tourist traffic through the Cathedral and thus the income these tourists bring into the Cathedral coffers.

The Cathedral council sought a trespass order to have the protestors removed. Thankfully the dean, canon Giles Fraser, saw clearly the moral issues raised by the protestors and he resigned his post while the cathedral itself failed to see the Christ on its own steps.

The Occupy Movement is active here in Aotearoa New Zealand with similar responses.

The Dunedin City Council is seeking to have protestors removed and other councils are waiting to see the outcome of this action.

I have to say, I am firmly in the Occupy Movement camp. I cannot literally pitch my tent, but I can stand here and say that the gospel demands that we stand alongside the 99% and admonish the 1%.

When company executives continue to reap huge rewards from the companies they head while employees languish on low incomes or live with the threat of job losses by outsourcing to cheaper employment markets as in the case of Qantas; when banks continue to make obscene profits while its customer base struggle with rising fees as in the case of the ANZ; when government policy continues to attack the poorest and most vulnerable in our communities in the guise of 'welfare reform'; then we must say 'enough'!

Our readings this morning offer us a challenge.

Joshua has led the people into their promised land. But now they need to make a choice.

Do they choose to serve the God who has saved them from slavery in Egypt and stood by them through thick and thin, or do they choose to serve other Gods?

Do they commit themselves to a community of love and selflessness; or do they choose individualism and selfishness; are they a people of God or not?

We might ask ourselves the very same question.

And Jesus reminds us that we must be ready for the promised realm of God. We must have our 'wicks trimmed' so that when the groom comes will be prepared and ready.

Do we stand with the 99% or the 1?

In a few weeks' time we will be casting our vote for who will be governing our nation for the next three years.

We need to guard against personality cults and populist statements. Rather we must look deeper with eyes to see and ears to hear. We must discern what are gospel values in the messages of the candidates.

Who speaks for the marginalised, the poor, the homeless, the under and un-employed, the elder people and the youngest in our community – those who are vulnerable; who speaks for a fairer sharing of resources and for a sustainable and caring attitude to our environment.

In our notice sheet today Susan has pointed us to the Church Leader's Statement as we make our decisions about who we will vote for.

They have asked us to consider Fairness, Stewardship and Social Wellbeing, the three legs to the stool of community harmony and wellbeing.

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It is probably not time to blow up the Beehive, but it is time to be revolutionary; let us wear the 'Guy Fawkes mask' as a symbol which stands against, tyranny, oppression, sexism, racism and greed in all its forms; let's stand with the Occupy Movement as people peacefully seek to confront the 1% on behalf of the 99%; let's have our wick's trimmed and let's never fail to recognise the Christ in all his and her various guises...

...for you never know when the Christ is sitting on your front steps!