

**Sermon preached at the funeral of Gordon Howard Lane at Kingsbury Church.**

**The Bible reading was Micah 4.1-5.**

"You can make anything out of metal". So Gordon would confidently claim, often in response to his friend Terry Hewetson's rival claim, that "You can make anything out of wood". I'm inclined to think they were both right, but certainly in Gordon's hands the preferred material was metal. You don't have to look far from where we now are to see the supporting evidence; railings, a church safe and its fittings, hand bells, tower bells, tractors; you can make anything out of metal.

And with skill - and Gordon supremely had the skill - you can take metal that might have been forged for one purpose, and turn it to another. Hence this reading, from the prophet Micah, with its famous words, "*they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks*". From weapons of war to agricultural implements and machinery; the craftsman, who can make anything out of metal, turns and transforms the metal from a thing that harms to good and fruitful use.

But this reading from Micah, and my reason for choosing it as our reading today, goes beyond its tribute to the welder who can make anything out of metal. The prophet brings a message of hope, because it is not only metal that can be reshaped and renewed; through the power of God, it is creation and the very stuff of life itself that can and will be similarly changed. The beating of swords into ploughshares, of spears into pruning hooks, is an image of the transformation of a world of conflict and suffering and death into a world of peace, of flourishing and of life. The promise that God brings through Micah is of a future in which all that harms and destroys has become no more and in which, as the prophet says, "*they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid*".

The movement from swords to ploughshares is a movement from death to life; a movement that stands at the very heart of the church's faith in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Ours is an Easter faith, that declares triumphantly that the suffering and death of Good Friday is not the end of the matter; the rising of Jesus from the tomb recasts everything.

Gordon's faith, as with so much in his life, was both resolutely practical and deeply rooted. Whether singing in the choir, repairing the safe, ringing the bells, cutting hedges or sweeping the paths of endless autumn leaves, Gordon was a man for whom the watchword was "The job's got to be done" - and he did it, and always did it well. His fundraising efforts were tireless, and often creative; not just the rounds of door-knocking through the village, and leading the hand-bell team every night before Christmas, but included, so I gather, being part of a group dressing up as tarts and choir boys - and on this occasion Gordon was not one of the choir boys.

It was deeds, not words, that demonstrated the strength and reality of Gordon's faith. This faith, in which Gordon lived and died, is a faith that brings us the complete assurance that death does not have the final word. Micah's vision of a transformed creation, in which swords have been turned into ploughshares, is echoed in the vision of a new heaven and a new earth found in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation; and it is with words from that book that I would like to leave us now, words that quite surely apply to Gordon Howard Lane:

*"I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. They will rest from their labours, for they take with them the record of their deeds.'"*