

What if our politicians had a bias to the poor as the m...

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I have written several times already about Pat Lucas, the friend whose funeral I attended this week. I am doing so again. It's a measure of her influence on me, and what her funeral made me think about Christmas.

The hymn at her funeral was an interpretation of the sermon Jesus gave in Nazareth at the start of his ministry, which is found in Luke 4, starting at verse 16. The critical section is actually when Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61, saying:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me,
to bring good news to the poor,
and has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*

At one level this is a claim to be the Messiah. It did not go down well.

At another level it was a summary of what his teaching was to be about.

Centuries of translation by a rich and powerful church has, according to some, left the meaning opaque.

The third line is unambiguous. Jesus' focus is on the poor. This reiterates the message in the so-called Magnificat in Luke 1, 46 and following. It seems the writer did not wish his audience to miss his point.

Other lines, though, have to be interpreted in this context, and especially the last two. The 'oppressed' were those burdened by debt. The 'year of the Lord's favour' was a Jubilee, when the slate was wiped clean on all debts, whoever they were between. Both represent the fear of debt so deeply implicit in the texts of the Old Testament. Call those debts the finance curse, if you like, because that was what they were.

I know this is how Pat saw this text, because we talked about it. More than that, it was how she interpreted her faith when giving it lived meaning. Even as her faith morphed into belief in a singular God for all people, with multiple paths to understanding, this remained her core belief.

Hers was a mission to the poor.

She demanded an end to the oppression of the finance industry.

She looked for a world free from the pernicious consequences of debt.

And she based that belief on the principle statement of explanation that Jesus gave for his mission. He died first upsetting the money changers in the Temple - the preserver of the currency of his day.

Pat knew what courage meant. Her uncle had been on Dachau for resistance activity, and survived it. She looked for courage in others. But it was always for a simple reason. She thought the ethical person had to bring good news to the poor and freedom from financial oppression.

Maybe Pat was most especially meant to be in Jersey at the time she lived there.

But suppose her message was universal? She did not demand conversion or faith. She was only interested in action. What if our politicians had a bias to the poor and a belief that they must relieve the oppression that debts can create? What sort of world would we live in?

That's just a thought for Christmas.