

2nd September 2020

Uncertainty

**"I lived uncertain, I die doubtful:
O thou Being of beings, have mercy upon me."**

Aristotle, thought to be his final words

A J Gossip was Professor of Christian Ethics and Practical Training in Trinity College, Glasgow, from 1928 to 1945 and was one of the foremost preachers of his day. Preaching was for him the heart of worship. "The priest is a useful enough functionary," he said, "with a real part to play, to whom we owe more than we always realise. But it is the preacher who sets [our] hearts burning, and the prophet who brings in a new day of the Lord." So, he was in great demand, as an academic, teacher and preacher.

A story is told of him that, on one occasion, because he had been travelling so much and had been so busy, he felt that the sermon he had prepared wasn't up to his usual standard. As he went into the pulpit, he was overcome with uncertainty. "But", he said, "I met my Lord at the bend of the pulpit steps. 'What have you for me today, Gossip?' my Lord, enquired, and I handed him my sermon in fear and trembling. My Lord read what I had written and said, 'Thank you, Gossip. That will do for me.' And he took my sermon and made it a trumpet for the Gospel."

Despite Gossip's uncertainty, that sermon, preached, no doubt, with passion, clarity and commitment, had its effect. Despite this great man's misgivings, his message carried the Gospel to the people.

There have been times when my sermons have been inadequately prepared. There have been times in my preaching when I have been consumed with uncertainty. There have been times when I believed I was falling short. But thank God, what was offered with integrity, passion and commitment, seemed to have its effect. It fell, somehow, on receptive ears, touching circumstances in people's lives that I could never have imagined.

Like A J Gossip (and Aristotle of old) I still have times of uncertainty. But my Lord keeps saying, "Show me what you have to offer." And when I do, I'm grateful when I hear his words. "Thank you. That will do for me."

A prayer for today

*Meet me, Lord, when I need you most, in my times of uncertainty and self-doubt.
Take what I have to offer, and, in your mercy, fit it into your purposes. Amen*

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