

May I speak in the name of God, Giver, Forgiver and Lover. Amen.

Gillian Tett is a managing editor of the *Financial Times* and an award winning journalist. She has covered the financial markets for twenty years. She also has a PhD from Cambridge University in social anthropology, and speaks French, Russian, Japanese, and Persian. So she knows a thing or two about money; and a thing or two about language and culture. According to Tett, financial language and its jargon is constructed to create power. Making an analogy with the medieval church she suggests that financiers use language in the same way that priests used Latin. By using a language no one else understands they gain power. In good times people don't understand the financial Latin, but they enjoyed its blessings in the form of cheap mortgages. But when the bad times come the non-Latin speaking laity are left incomprehending the language of Credit Default Swaps and collateralized debt obligations and so on.

Since the dawn of time, knowing the names of things has been seen as giving control of those things. And in today's Gospel, Jesus is confronted by someone who believes that knowing his name gives control of Jesus to him. The man with the unclean spirit assumes that naming Jesus as the Holy One of God will give him the ability to control Jesus. But Jesus resists. And instead Jesus changes the dynamics by showing how the man who seeks control is actually himself under the control of another force.

The language of possession and evil spirits is notoriously difficult territory. And I cannot hope but wonder why we couldn't have had a more cheerful or positive reading to think about on this Annual

Meeting Sunday. But the readings are set for a reason. They force us to confront things we don't like to confront. And one of the things we don't like to confront is that there are times and places where people do evil things. I happen not to think that people who do evil things are themselves inherently evil. And nor did the scriptures. But the way we think about evil is radically different today from then. Two thousand years ago people sought to account for the evil that was done with reference to other demonic and diabolical agencies. Today we are more sophisticated in our understanding how individual agency can be impaired.

It is easy to imagine how a pre-scientific people would seek to explain strange and odd happenings with reference to forces unseen and not understood. But today if we are presented with odd and aberrant behavior it is right to think about someone's mental health needs. And as studies have shown, most of us, at one time or another, have significant mental health needs.

One of the perennial difficulties of Christianity has been that there are just so many successors of the man with the unclean spirit. And they are not limited to the mentally ill. There are also the people who believe that they have control of the name of God, simply because they have access to the scriptures. To put it bluntly, there are far too many people who call themselves Christians who do so not because they trust in God, but because they think they have found a way to control others. For them the bible is a mental strait-jacket, and they cannot think outside of it for fear of where that might lead them. Such people also fear the mainstream traditions within Judaism and Christianity that have encouraged us to reflect on the multiple and diverse meanings of the scriptures.

Here at St Thomas we do not believe that the scriptures are to be used as a stick with which we should beat others. We believe in a God who is radically loving, fundamentally forgiving, and absolutely hospitable. We also believe that at God's very heart God is pure relationality, community and, economy.

For centuries before the latest financial crisis, theologians have talked of God as being an economy, and having an economical relationship with the world. What this means is that God has always been profoundly interrelated with human beings, and fundamentally intertwined in human life. Truth be told, Christianity is not a very good form of monotheism. Unlike the purity of Judaism and Islam, Christianity always threatens to veer into polytheism or pantheism. We believe that God is closer to each of us than we are ourselves. And just as God is revealed as a fellowship of three persons, Father Son and Spirit, so the Christian Church is called to reveal God in many different people.

Diversity is at the heart of our view of God, because God is diverse. And if God is diverse, then our duty as Christians is to create a community of people who are not the same. The economy of God also requires us never to stand still, and never to be complacent. Like capital in the financial economy, the divine economy is in constant flux, overflowing boundaries and seeking to include absolutely everyone. The financial economy measures growth in terms of percentage points. The divine economy uses different metrics. We know whether we are on the right track when we amaze others with the quality of our hospitality, the passion of our faith, and the sincerity of our forgiveness. But above all, we will know whether we are on the right track when we allow ourselves to love one another and our wider world.

The authority with which Jesus taught was so palpable and so clear that Mark's gospel does not even record what he said. Mark did not need to. What mattered was that everyone was so impressed that they could not be amazed and want to follow Jesus. They saw Christ's love and could not but be transformed by that love.

Talking of love is one of the easiest things to do. Practicing love is one of the hardest things. If we are to live the Christian life, we need to remember that no one can do it alone. Not even Jesus could go it alone, and we certainly cannot. We cannot love if we are not loved. We cannot forgive if we never experience forgiveness. And we cannot be faithful if we never witnessed faithfulness. We need each other so that we can learn from one another. We also need to learn from the others we do not yet know.

There is a lot to do, and a lot to learn in the Christian life. And the moment we think we have learned everything we can be absolutely sure that we have completely lost the plot. If we are to learn more about God, we need to be willing to learn how to speak a new language: the language of faith, hope and love. We live in fearful and anxious times, and the desire for control is a natural response to fear. But God's economy is one that is based neither on fear or control, but the faith to have hope and the freedom to seek love.

One of the best illustrations of this came this past week in a letter written by Bob Strauss, a devoted parishioner. Writing to the editor in the Valley News, Bob quoted from the interfaith work of "A Common Word Between Us and You":

"So let our differences not cause hatred and strife between us. Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works. Let us

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respect each other, be fair, just, and kind to one another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill.”

May each of us take those words to heart. Unlike the language of high finance the language of faith is ultimately very simple. Wherever there is forgiveness there is God. Wherever there is generosity there is God. Wherever there is love there is God. Amen.