

## **Address Installation Service 2025**

It's lovely to be with you this evening, and although of course others will be doing this too later on, may I, on behalf of us all, thank James for his year as Master and all that he has accomplished - it's been a terrific year with the granting of livery and our tenth anniversary. I have particularly valued his friendship, his kindness, his encouragement of community and his welcome of new Freeman – thank you James. And may I also welcome Alastair, just back from a well-earned break after his year as Lord Mayor. It is an honour to have him as our new Master and we look forward to all that he will bring to the role in the coming months.

Although this is a day for celebrating and giving thanks, our readings this evening are definitely the sort that give you pause for thought. For instance, the prophet Micah has some pretty stern warnings in our first reading. As members of a City livery company, I'm not sure which is likely to alarm us more: the idea of acquiring money without being able to save any, or the idea of treading grapes but not then being able to drink the wine! On the other hand, as an organisation dedicated to good practice and high ethical standards in our profession, we would probably join with Micah in condemning the 'false measure', the 'accursed short bushel', the 'rigged scales' and the 'fraudulent weights' which appear to have been the way business was being done in his own city, Jerusalem, at the time.

Micah's punches hit home, but with good reason. He was writing in the late 8th century BC, but there are certain echoes of our own times. It was a tumultuous era, with Samaria, the northern kingdom, having just fallen to a foreign invader. As a result, Jerusalem was swamped with immigrants and subject to rapid expansion; there was corruption and social division. Meanwhile an aggressive superpower, Assyria, was causing instability across the entire region. Micah's response was a populist one, condemning Jerusalem and its leaders for their deceit and dishonesty.

Like Micah, we are also living at a time of change and upheaval. The relative stability of the time since the end of the Cold War is being challenged; authoritarian governments are on the rise; there is an existential threat in the shape of the climate crisis; and great inequalities persist between rich and poor. Here in the City there is increased competition from other financial centres and the challenge of harnessing new technologies such as AI effectively.

But Micah never lost faith in the future: if you read the entire book, you will see that themes of judgement are interspersed with wonderful visions of hope for better times: a restored and glorious Zion to which the whole world would make pilgrimage, governed by an ideal king. So the sternest bits of Micah are in part a rhetorical device to prod people into action: to try to work towards this new, better time that he foresaw.

And I think both our now Immediate Past Master and our new Master – and indeed probably many of you - share a belief in prompt action too: in the need to act now to make the City and more widely our country and our world a better place: better in particular through entrepreneurship to provide more prosperity, more jobs, more companies acting for the good of the many, not the few. One of the mantras of our education and outreach teams, and of our now Immediate Past Master, is ‘Imperfect action is better than perfect inaction’. Or as our new Master put it to me even more succinctly: ‘get on with it’. In our second reading Jesus tells a parable about a rich man storing up his wealth for himself, thinking he can then take it easy for the future, instead of considering how he can use it in the service of God. He then dies before he has the chance to spend any of it. Jesus’ point of course is that we are all called to use what we have – whether that is treasure or gifts and abilities – in the service of the good and of others. And we are called to do that not at some vague far-off time in the future but NOW.

I am so impressed each year to see the number of wonderful young companies competing for the EASI award, harnessing an entrepreneurial mindset to develop innovative social or environmental products or services. Timely input in terms of money and mentoring by members of our company has made a huge difference in helping them progress – acting at an early stage really does make a difference. Our new Master’s scale-up showcases, bringing together tech companies and investors at Mansion House during his mayoral year, have also shown what success swift and determined action can bring. And the work of the Entrepreneurs Trust in education and charitable grants has seen members giving of their time and expertise in really immediate ways to make a difference, especially to the young on whom our future depends: teaching others to act now is vital too. So as Entrepreneurs, and although so much has been achieved over the last 10 years, the time really is now to use our skills and resources ever more efficiently to overcome the challenges we currently face. And helping people progress in our own area of expertise is of course exactly what a livery company should be doing. Our Company is wonderfully diverse, with a real range of men and women of different ages, of different faiths or of none, and with experience of entrepreneurship in a wide variety of different sectors. Tonight’s readings are an encouragement to us all to consider what we have to give, in terms of time, ideas, gifts or philanthropy.

Jesus often spoke about the Kingdom of God: a place of justice and peace where all are valued and can flourish; where war and poverty are no more. It may sound an impossible dream but actually each of us can play a part, however small, in working towards it, and I think entrepreneurs with their particular skills of creativity and resilience can make a big difference. As a quote used on our website from the American writer Margaret Mead puts it: ‘Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it’s the only thing that ever has.’

So all good wishes to Alastair as he embarks on his year as Master. In the coming year, under his leadership, may our Company be ever more active for change to help tackle the world's problems. And may membership of this Company help him and each of us to continue to give our own particular gifts in this joint endeavour. Amen.

Preached at the Church of St Lawrence Jewry next Guildhall on the occasion of the Installation of the 12th Master of the Worshipful Company of Entrepreneurs

The Reverend Sophia Acland, 24th November 2025