

Second Sunday of Epiphany

15 January 2023

Message – Shine with your bit of light

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts always be yours O God, Source of All Being, Eternal Word, and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

God's self-revelation part two. Today's readings express, in different ways, vocation: God's calling for individuals or groups of people as a way of revealing God's self.

Most of Isaiah is written as poetry and much of the book can be broken into a series of acts and scenes. The prophecies generally take on a more positive note from, depending on your point of view, either chapter thirty-four or forty. The change is so marked that scholars generally think, we have a second author or school of authors writing in the name of Isaiah.

Our first reading was the start of a new act in this poem and we read the start of the first scene with the description of the first player, Israel, and the start of the description of the second player Darius, the new ruler of Persia.

The poem portrays Israel is lamenting that God is not working through them and restoring their kingdom. Yet, Isaiah as a whole shows how God is working to comfort, redeem, and renew Israel. This little episode is showing how God worked to bring about the reign of Darius, a profoundly unlikely new ruler of Persian Empire, poetically put in our reading:

to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,
the slave of rulers,

The prophecies of Isaiah challenge any simple notion of how God may be at work in the world. Israel has survived but has not prospered in the way that they would like. Being God's servant, whether as a nation or an individual, is often not very glamorous. The prophecies of Isaiah part two repeated point to how God is indeed at work caring for Israel but through the lives of people who, neither we nor they, would think of as servants of God.

It's a not so subtle reminder not to think of others as not having God at work in their lives, even when they would utterly deny such a possibility. Seekers after the truth take many paths and some are very different to our own. Our calling is to reveal the light and love of God, God's self, an essential part of which is not putting out that light that others have found but rather cherishing and encouraging it.

Our second reading is perhaps a little odd. Normally, when we greet people, we don't give a long description of who they are. Just occasionally, however, it is important to let people know their place in our perspective of things.

Here, St Paul is setting the foundation for all that he is going to say in his letter. Paul says to the church of Corinth, you "are called to be saints", he points to the gifts they have already been given, "the grace of God that has been given you... in speech and knowledge of every kind... you are not lacking in any spiritual gifts... so that you may be blameless on the last day."

Paul is expressing his own vocation as someone called to build up the church. He has some pointers for improvements but importantly he starts by affirming them, in many regards

putting them on the same footing as him. They are a part of the same heavenly family as Paul and the Apostles. Their calling too is to be God's holy ones; set aside for God; servants of God; just as Israel, Darius, and Paul, were servants of God.

Paul leaves the church of Corinth in no doubt that God calls them. While the church today may be facing some tough times, it does not mean that God is not at work in the world, it does not mean that God is not at work in the church, and it certainly does not mean that we are not called to be holy.

A part of our calling is to see with the eyes of the prophecies of Isaiah. To name the ways in which we have not served God and to see where God is now at work and to join in that work, which may be occurring through some of the most unlikely people and circumstances, at least in our limited vision. To God, it is all part of a whole, God is at work in all things.

Our gospel reading doesn't talk of the calling of Jesus. John's gospel doesn't even tell us if Jesus was baptised. Yet, after centuries of debate, we proclaim that Jesus was fully human and fully God. So, Jesus must have discerned his calling just as each of us discerns our calling. And, Christ has offered to each of us the same Spirit from heaven that rested and remained on him. It's not usually a loud voice within us, we have to listen.

Truly understanding how Jesus Christ could be both fully human and fully God is quite beyond us, as is understanding how Jesus became the lamb who died once for all. There are some interesting theories and theologies but all fail when pushed to their limits. The best we can do is set some logical boundaries and see some of the consequences of the apparent logical

contradictions, mysteries, that emerge: the rest is an act of faith, an embracing of necessary and wonderful mysteries.

John, like the other gospels, does point to the calling of the disciples. We start with two of John's disciples. The role of John as preparing the way for Christ is emphasised as John points his disciples towards Jesus and they start to follow Jesus instead of Christ. Here we see an example of truly being a servant of God. We all point beyond ourselves to the God who is love.

It is interesting that we only know the name of one of the two disciples who followed Jesus that day. One suggestion is that the other may have been the disciple whom Jesus loved. The mention of the second disciple seems significant to the author but much as the name of the disciple whom Jesus loved is never given so the name is not given here.

The idea that the disciple whom Jesus loved is John is well known but scholarship of the last few decades has brought this into question. When we are critical, we realise there is a lot that we don't know about the fourth gospel. There is little evidence for who, where, or when it was written. While this may frustrate, it does not detract from the message of the gospel.

Here we have John the Baptist as a witness to Jesus as God's chosen one and passing this on his own followers, one of whom in turn witnessed to his brother Simon Peter, his brother, and so the community of the body of Christ started to grow.

All of our readings today are about our calling to be a witness to the love of God. Israel was called to be a witness to the nations of a loving and compassionate God. Darius, unwittingly, was a witness as God worked through him. The church of Corinth was

a witnessing community, working out together how to be the body of Christ in the city of Corinth. Sometimes doing that well and sometimes, not so well.

John the Baptist, in the image of a Hebrew Prophet, was a witness to the coming of the Messiah. He pointed to the light as had the prophets before him. Andrew, Simon Peter, and the other disciple saw the light and knew they needed to follow and pass on the light. This is our calling too.

Last week, I put this in terms of our calling as a community; it is also our calling as individuals. In every aspect of our lives we bear witness to our values and beliefs. It can be hard to shine with the light of Christ when we encounter others. To love those who annoy us, who push our buttons, is a real challenge.

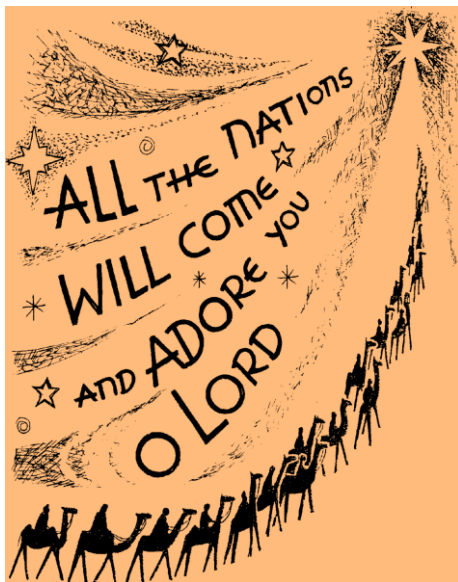
To consider the consequences of all of our actions is beyond any one of us and so we come back to the importance of our family of faith as well as our individual actions. Each one of us will have our own passions and calling, which we must pursue recognising that it is part of a greater whole.

We are not called to do everything, we are simply called to play our part and to pursue our unique bit of light and truth, while supporting others in their calling too. In this way we will reveal God's light to those who are looking for it, as a series of lights among our community and as a light on this sacred hill.

May God continue to gently direct us towards the light, and by the Holy Spirit guide us and transform us that we may shine more brightly with the light of Christ, as revealed in each one of us, and the Love of God for all in our community. Amen. Amen.

Christ, who by his incarnation gathered into one things earthly and heavenly,
fill you with peace and goodwill
and make you partakers of the divine nature;
and the blessing ...

May the joy of the angels,
the eagerness of the shepherds,
the perseverance of the wise men,
the obedience of Joseph and Mary,
and the peace of the Christ-child
be yours this Christmas;
and the blessing of God almighty,
Our Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life
be with you always. **Amen**







2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men^[a] from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we

observed his star at its rising,^[b] and have come to pay him homage.’³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah^[c] was to be born. ⁵They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd^[d] my people Israel.”

⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men^[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising,^[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped,^[g] they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

In all of our actions, grand and small, may the light and love of God be seen, here and everywhere, now and in eternity.
Amen. Amen. Amen.