

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn: 149 One there is above all others

Reading: Isaiah 41. 21-29 God challenges the idols

Prayers:

I remember going to India for the first time and thinking that I would never be able to have any sympathy for Hinduism. I knew that it is a religion which is intensely visual and that in temples and homes there are representations of the gods of that remarkable faith.....

In my good protestant way I thought all these visual representations of the gods of Hinduism were only as idols which were worshipped!

The reality I began to discover was far more complex. At one level, for some people, the images had become the gods themselves. At a more sophisticated level, the images were the gateway through which the worshipper passed into the spiritual world.

Still more unexpectedly, I came to see that behind the many images of the gods in Hinduism there is the belief in the one God, Brahma.

Brahma is beyond all representation and on beyond this one God who is beyond all definition all other gods and all creation and all humanity depend.

I say all this because out of our Jewish roots we do have a deep reservation about any portrayal of God. So, when we listen to Isaiah speaking about "idols" we remember that what we call idols are not necessarily the ultimate reality which others are worshipping. They may be more like icons, a means by which we go beyond the outward and visible to perceive the inward and spiritual.

Nevertheless, having said all that, Isaiah lived in Babylon with its temples in which there were a multitude of images of God. For many people, they were, literally, the God who they feared but on whom they also depended for their food and drink, their prosperity and success.

Isaiah challenges these idols to predict what the one, living God is about to do.

- They can't.
- They are lifeless and have no power of speech.

Isaiah speaks in the name of the living God and declares that he is active and powerful. Isaiah tells the Jewish captives that God is at work in the great new leader from Persia, Cyrus;

***"I stirred up one from the north, and he has come,
From the rising of the sun he was summoned by name."***

The sun rises in the East but Isaiah says he comes from the North.
How can the two say go together?

Well, Persia is to the East of Babylon but to get from Persia to Babylon is a circle which ultimately brings Cyrus from the north down the valley of the River Tigris.

Comment [PA&RSB1]: Ask
Colin

Idols are the visible images which people worship. Strangely, our society has created the phrase "pop idol", perhaps unaware of the irony of creating out of ordinary people, women and men we worship.

The fascination with celebrity in sport, the arts, even in politics is a sign of how people can become our idols, an expression of all that want to be. As people touch the image of their god in the hope they will be blessed through that contact so people hope to be blessed through the touch of the person they idolise!

Yet, the worship of this material world is perhaps our greatest idol. It's not that material is evil in itself (though there have been those who have had this attitude) but that it can become the be all and end-all of our lives.

The danger is when we cease to ask those questions

- **What does God want us to enjoy**
- **What does he want us to share**
- **Who or what is at the heart of our life.**

If you watched Warren Buffett, a multibillionaire, on TV last night you will have heard him speak of his contempt for those who make fortunes and assume that it's all been their cleverness and who don't recognise their duty to return much of that money to those who made their wealth possible and those for whom life is hard. He's given away over 30 billion dollars!

Jesus warned his friends of the dangers of creating idols.

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Our communion is a our commitment to the God we meet in Jesus, a declaration that beyond this material world we give first place to the God of grace, the living God who is active in our lives and in history who has the power to set free and to renew us through his love.

To him be all praise and glory.

Amen.