

## TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn:

Reading: Isaiah 42.1-4,

Prayers

### **Servants' work**

Our prophet has proclaimed to the Jewish captives in Babylon that through the coming of Cyrus, the dynamic general from Persia, Babylon will be overthrown and the Jewish slaves returned to Jerusalem. He can even say that God is at work through this man who with his powerful armies, through his conquering power, will bring them their release.

Yet, the release of the Jewish captives is to be the beginning of a new work of God.

- It's a work that is for the sake of "justice" for both Jew and gentile.
- It will be accomplished not through force but through the gentleness of the "servant" of God.

There has been much speculation as to the identity of this servant of God.

Is the servant a prophet?

Is the servant the people of Israel as a whole?

Perhaps the servant is a combination of the two just as Christians see Jesus as uniquely the "servant of God" but recognise that each of us is called to a servant ministry, sharing in his work and in his witness.

Three times in these four verses "justice" is mentioned, emphasising how central this is to the servant's task. The servant will "bring forth justice to the nations" and establish "justice in the earth".

The word for justice is the Hebrew "mishpat", a word with a rich variety of meanings. It can mean quite straightforward justice and in the Hebrew Scriptures this often means justice for those who are denied justice because of their poverty, weakness or race.

It can also mean something very like "true religion" because God is a God who creates right relationships, the very heart of what good religion is all about: a right relationship with God and with our neighbour.

Extraordinarily, Isaiah tells these slaves that they are to be caught up in this work and that it's not just for their own people but for the "nations". Indeed, the gentile "coastlands" are longing to hear this word about God's justice, this new way in which people can live together before God.

Unlike the way in which Cyrus seeks to create a new empire this new community will come into being through those who do not shout out like the rabble-rouser, who do not condemn the weak but who encourage them with understanding and gentleness,

who are faithful to God.

But these aren't weak people! They will "grow faint or be crushed" and will keep going until God's "justice" is established on earth!

Sunday is Remembrance Sunday and we will remember how the rabble-rousers of this world plunged the world into two terrible World Wars. We will give thanks for all those who gave their lives to save the world from being dominated by those who believed that military might should dominate the world.

Yet, we will also remember that whilst many people believe that God may sometimes use military power to overcome a still greater evil it's not the way in which God's Kingdom is ultimately created.

God's Kingdom is created through the servants of God who both demonstrate in their own lives and speak with quiet confidence of that "justice" which God wants all people to enjoy.

It is the justice which encourages those who have been downtrodden and helps to lift them up. It is the justice which creates new relationships between those who have been enemies.

It is the justice which enables women and men to see each other in the light of God's love and care not just for one particular people but for the whole of humanity.

Those of us who are Christians may well feel that we are not far from the life and death of Jesus and all that he revealed to us of what it means to be faithful to God in the way we live our lives on earth.

As we celebrate our communion today we do so in the belief that he was the true servant of God, and that through our unity with him we are caught up in his servant vocation to the world.

Amen.