

TUESDAY COMMUNION
"Singing in Captivity"

Hymn:

Reading: Isaiah 42.10-17

Prayers:

My newspaper tells the story of the man who has been diagnosed as being in a state of persistent vegetative coma for 23 years. Three years ago it was realised that his brain function was almost normal after he began to indicate with his foot "Yes" and "No" to the questions he was asked.

He was taught to move a finger which operates a computer and allows him to communicate. "It's like being born again to a new life," he said.

The prophet speaks to those who are still prisoners but he urges them to believe that God both remembers them and that he is already acting on their behalf so that they may become free people.

God is at work to give them new life!

One of the things which made it difficult for many to believe that God was really at work on their behalf was the ancient belief that God only operated on his "own territory".

His territory was the land of Israel. Once one got to Babylon it was beyond the range of his concern and his power to act. Part of Second Isaiah's task is to convince the slaves is that the God of Israel is the universal God.

He tells the slaves that the whole of creation is praising the God who sets free his people.

"Let the sea roar" in praise to God, he says.

This must have seemed strange to some of his hearers because often the sea was regarded as a wild place beyond the concern of God.

Jonah, in the story, tries to escape from God by running off to sea. But to Isaiah, the sea is not the place to escape from God but part of his creation, a place where God may be found and where he may be praised.

Isaiah gives us two vivid pictures of God.

- He pictures God as being like a warrior- who acts to save his people. That doesn't mean that God is a warrior- or a God who delights in violence but that he acts to rescue his people from their captivity.
- He also gives a very different picture of God, really quite extraordinary, of God as being like a woman giving birth to new life.

God is not passive. He is not a God who is uncaring or indifferent. He is the God who acts to rescue those who are imprisoned and to give new life to those who feel as though life has lost all meaning and purpose.

What does all this say to us?

1. Of course, in theory we believe in a universal God, a God who is not confined. Yet, in practice people have often preferred to place limits on God.

For different reasons people have wanted to think that God is not concerned for our enemies, not concerned for with our political life, not concerned with how we make money or use it, not concerned with our sexuality and our relationships.....

The God of who Isaiah speaks is the God of all life and the God whose concern is for all people.

2. Secondly, he is the God of new life.

It is always exciting to see signs of new life:

- in creation as winter gives way spring
- the birth of a child
- a person set free from illness or to triumph over disability
- a person who comes to believe that God loves them and responds with joy to the God they meet in Jesus.

Sometimes we don't see that new life but dare to believe it is still awaiting them.

I will be taking the funeral of a lady who has been very unhappy over these last years. I dare to hope that she is already finding a peace and a joy she has not known in recent times.....

Isaiah urges the slaves in Babylon to "sing a new song" even while they wait in captivity.

Christians dare to sing songs of faith and hope and joy even when life is hard and the future seems dark because we believe in a God who acts to save and who has not forgotten us.

Our communion is a song of praise to God for the freedom and the new life God will give to those who for one reason or another feel imprisoned.

It is a statement of faith in the God who acts to save and to give new life.

It is the offering of our love to the God who first loved us.

Amen.