

TUESDAY COMMUNION
"When we don't "see" or "hear""

Hymn: 241 Lo, he comes with clouds descending

Reading: Isaiah 42.18-25

Prayers:

I nearly skipped this passage. What follows is much more to my liking and you will enjoy hearing the stirring promises of God which we find in chapter 43!
(Don't miss next week's instalment!)

The way in which Isaiah speaks of the Jewish slaves in Babylon you would think they were a hopeless case. The physical condition of some of them is desperate. He describes them as "robbed and plundered", lacking the necessities of life.

They are "trapped in holes and hidden in prisons", sounding to my ears like a Dickensian slum where conditions are terrible. What is more they have become "a prey with no one to rescue!" They appear to face the future abandoned and alone.

Spiritually they are also in a mess. He describes their condition as being like people who are blind to what is God is doing and deaf to what he is saying. This is a long-standing problem for in Isaiah's view it was this unwillingness to listen to God or to fore-see the consequences of their way of life which resulted in their captivity in the first place.

As far as Isaiah is concerned the overthrow of Jerusalem and the captivity of Israel is a direct result of this failure to see, hear and act. A people who do not see what God is doing or listen to him will not act with wisdom:

***"Who gave up Jacob to the spoiler,
And Israel to the robbers?
Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned?"***

Our reading finished with words which are far removed from "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild."

***"So he poured upon him the heat of his anger
And the fury of war....."***

If you go to the British Museum you can see stone carvings which show the Israelites trudging towards Babylon, demoralised and without hope.

In Advent, as we wait to celebrate the coming of light in Jesus we turn the light the light upon ourselves. We ask God to give us eyes to see and ears to hear the truth about ourselves, the church and society.

What is the truth about nation?

Have we chosen to so mock and marginalise the Christian faith that few people today have the sense that Christ has the power to shape the way we live together?

Are we any longer a society in which the love of Christ partly shapes the way we think about each other and treat each other?

I'm not trying to idealise the past but to suggest that what was once a foundation of our community life has in many places been completely lost!

We are in danger of losing our sense of being a community under God, of our responsibility to each other and become far more self-seeking and grasping. Was our banking crisis a result, at least in part, of this "every person for him or herself", mentality?

What of the church?

I think it was Yeats who wrote of how in his day:

- ***"the best lack all conviction***
- ***and the worst are filled with a terrible intensity."***

Does the church have to be one or the other? To what extent does the church in Buxton and this church family hold onto convictions which come out a reasonable faith?

To what extent do we give expression to that faith with a love that is not mere sentimentality but is truly Christ-like?

To what extent does the church make a real difference to our community and the individuals within it?

Isaiah believed that, in this world, where people turn against what God wants for them there are consequences. It's not that God wants to punish us but that in a moral universe what we believe and how we live has real consequences.

A nation which forgets God and mocks those who ask, "What does the Lord require of us?" may be heading for trouble.

A church which is overconfident in its own wisdom or indifferent to the challenge of Christ may be in difficulty.

Our own failure to be honest about ourselves may take us in directions which are not for our good.

Isaiah would surely urge us to look and listen for the sake of our nation, church, and our own lives.

Amen.