

TUESDAY COMMUNION  
"Steadfast love despite our folly"

Hymn: 82 Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes

Reading: Isaiah 43.1-7

Prayers:

I remember my Senior School headmaster, Donald Hughes the son of one of the outstanding Methodist Ministers of the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was no small thing to be hauled before him if one had committed some serious misdemeanour.

He had a way with words which made us aware how foolish and stupid we had been, how greatly he had been disappointed by our failure to realise the consequences of our actions. One could feel very small after a "dressing down" by Donald Hughes.

Last week we listened to Isaiah as he spoke of Israel as a people who were blind and deaf to what God was saying to them. The consequence of their failure to take God seriously was that they had suffered the overthrow of their nation and captivity in Babylon.

God was no walkover. Human failure has real consequences for individuals, communities and nations.

Yet, Donald Hughes was also the headmaster who refused to use the cane when it was customary for boys to be beaten in many schools up and down the land. If he could make pupils feel small he also had the gift of encouraging them, of helping to see the value God gave to their lives and the God-given potential within them.

Isaiah declares,

***"Thus says the Lord,  
- He who formed you, O Israel....."***

The relationship of God to Israel goes far beyond any one human image. It is more than headmaster to pupils or parents to children, for God is the beginning and the end of life.

"In him we live and move and have our being."

Yet the images of the good head-teacher or of the kindly parent are not wholly inappropriate. One of the privileges of being a parent is to name their children. In Isaiah God says, ***"I have called you by name, you are mine."***

The people of Israel have been so-named by the God who has brought them into being through the call of Abraham long before.....

They are precious in God's sight.....

Like a good parent God does not cease to care for those who are his children:  
***“You are precious in my sight,  
And honoured, and I love you.”***

When the going gets tough for his children God promises,  
***“Do not fear I am with you.”***

But do these promises apply to us?

One of the things that Isaiah sought to do was to help Israel to begin to see that all people are loved by God and precious to him. However, that didn't take away from Israel's sense that they were a people who mattered greatly to God.”

When a child is brought to be baptised I always remind parents that baptism isn't a moment at which he begins to love their child. His love is for every child. Rather, baptism is our response to the love of God which already exists.

It is a great privilege to be baptised, to know that we belong within the family of God but it doesn't mean that he loves others any the less.....

So we can claim the privileges of being ***“called”*** and ***“named”*** by God, for he knows each of us as his daughters and sons.

We can claim the promise as individuals and a church,  
***“You are precious in my sight”***  
and the assurance,  
***“Do not fear, I will be with you.”***

What we mustn't forget is that if we are, indeed, those to whom these great promises are given, we are also those who are called to live as women and men who choose to “see” what God is doing and to “hear” what he is saying.

The good parent and the good head-teacher are also those who have the right and duty to discipline those who they love.

Faith certainly offers great comfort and reassurance but it also contains the warning to take seriously what God expects of us in our life in this world.

Amen.