

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn:

Reading: Isaiah 6.8-10, Isaiah 42.5-9

Prayers:

More light, please!

The first part of the Book of Isaiah tells us about a prophet who lived many years before Isaiah of Babylon. In the days before Jerusalem was overthrown, his message to Israel, and especially those with power and authority, was extremely challenging.

He spoke about the failure of Israel to take God seriously. The Kings of Israel had proved a great disappointment. Time and again they became caught up in the worship of foreign gods and imported their idols. As they worshipped other gods they also cared less and less about the ethical demands which we find in the Hebrew scriptures, those passages which tell how people are to be treated: with justice and kindness.

Isaiah is called to the kind of ministry few of us relish. It is the ministry of warning a nation that it is going off the rails and that the outcome will be disastrous.

Her very security is threatened and her belief that God will never allow Jerusalem to fall is challenged by the prophet. Few take any notice of him and so the words of God at his call come to pass:

***Make the mind of this people dull,
and stop their ears and shut their eyes.***

Many years later, the new prophet we call Second Isaiah reminds the exiles in Babylon that these former things have come to pass. God gave them warning of what would happen if they continued in their old ways.

Now God is speaking another word which is equally true. It is the word of hope to a people who God is about to rescue from slavery: their liberation will be for the sake of the nations.

***I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.***

I sometimes wish we could sit Isaiah down and ask him precisely what he meant. The words are so evocative but what did he expect to happen?

I suspect that he might have said three things:

- **First**, that Israel's knowledge of God is not only for Israel but for all the nations. He is a God who acts to save not only Israel but the nations and offers them a true way of knowing God and of living in peace and justice with each other.
- **Secondly**, that spiritually this knowledge of God opens the eyes of those who are blind so that they can see God's care for them and give them a profound sense of peace and freedom.
- **Thirdly**, that where there is real justice people are not going to be confined unfairly at the whim of a ruler.

What might God be saying to us through this?

- Is there a warning to our own nation that when we give first place to that which is not God then we put ourselves at risk? In a democracy that's a question not just for party political leaders but for each one of us. Indeed, are our hopes and dreams for the future founded on what we believe may be God's agenda for this nation and this world.
- In what sense is the church called to be a "light" to our own nation? If so, do we reveal anything of that?

Did our Churches Together Meeting last night give hope that we have something to say to our country?

Does this church offer a message that could release those people who are in prisons of fear or who live day by day in the darkness of ignorance and hopelessness?

Isaiah's message was echoed by Jesus.

It was a challenge and inspiration to him in his ministry and it continues to be one that has the power to inspire us today!

We exist not for our own sake but so that all people may be free to live that life that God wants for them.

Amen.