

Isaiah 60.1-9

60 "Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.

² See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the LORD rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.

³ Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

⁴ "Lift up your eyes and look about you:
All assemble and come to you;
your sons come from afar,
and your daughters are carried on the hip.

⁵ Then you will look and be radiant,
your heart will throb and swell with joy;
the wealth on the seas will be brought to you,
to you the riches of the nations will come.

⁶ Herds of camels will cover your land,
young camels of Midian and Ephah.

And all from Sheba will come,
bearing gold and incense
and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.

⁷ All Kedar's flocks will be gathered to you,
the rams of Nebaioth will serve you;
they will be accepted as offerings on my altar,
and I will adorn my glorious temple.

⁸ "Who are these that fly along like clouds,
like doves to their nests?

⁹ Surely the islands look to me;
in the lead are the ships of Tarshish,^[a]
bringing your children from afar,
with their silver and gold,
to the honor of the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel,
for he has endowed you with splendor.

Luke 4,14-21

¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."^[f]

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the

synagogue were fastened on him.²¹ He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

Prayer

Today I am preaching on Isaiah- Isaiah is a fabulous book! It is about holiness, and poetry, judgment and comfort and hope.

It is prophetic in every sense of the word, it shows insight into the corruption of the people of Isaiah's day; where routines, sacrifice and traditions were more important than hospitality grace and Almighty God. It looks forward to the coming of Almighty God into His world, and the comfort and transforming grace of God incarnate; God made man.

Isaiah is a wonderful example of how we must explore the Old Testament – or Jewish scripture, in order to make sense of the New Testament.

Not only because Jesus, his disciples, Paul and a good percentage of the early church were Jewish, and much of Jesus' teaching and almost all of Paul's is much better understood within it's Jewish context, but also because so much of the New Testament uses the Old- see my book!!

Our very well-known Gospel is Jesus directly quoting from Isaiah 40, and causing an uproar in the synagogue when he uttered the words "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"

Isaiah is one of my favourite books and one of the best attested. The Dead Sea Scrolls found in 1948 included a copy of the book that dated from 100 BC.

When the books of the bible including the Old Testament which is the Hebrew Bible, were written they had no chapters and verses- they flowed. But the division of Isaiah into 66 chapters is the same as the number of books in our bible. It divides neatly into two parts- the first 39 chapters (paralleling OT) and 27 chapters paralleling NT and both almost exactly summarise their halves of the bible; Judgment, comfort and hope! If you don't have time to read the whole bible then read Isaiah;

1-39 make sober reading but contain some beautiful imagery and poetry.

Chapter 40 (paralleling the NT) verse 3 begins "the voice of one calling in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord." It moves onto the servant of the Lord anointed by the Holy Spirit, dies for the sins of his people and is raised and exalted after his death and it finishes with " ... the new heavens and the new earth that I will make will endure before me" the same promise that is made in the final book of the NT -Revelation.

Isaiah is the source of much of our liturgy (our prayers) and our readings especially at Christmas when Isaiah 60 is read.

It is exceptional in the OT because it is concerned about the salvation of all people; not simply Israel, because it foresees the Messiah not as a warrior but as a servant king; “wounded for our transgressions” it is exceptional in that it anticipates God doing a New Thing.

40.9 You who bring good **news** to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good **news** to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!”

42 See, the former things have taken place, and **new** things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.”

43 See, I am doing a **new** thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

You get the point; Isaiah in the OT is the gospel – even the name Isaiah means “God saves”

One historian who is important to our study of scripture is Josephus – a Roman Jewish historian who wrote in the 1st Century. His writings on Jesus are a good independent source and he writes about Isaiah as a grandson of King Joash and therefore a cousin of Uzziah which makes him unusual for prophets tended to be from outside the centres of power in order to prophesy against them. However his

noble birth did not spare him a horrible death at the hands of Manasseh- a particularly brutal and evil King. His writing of the first 39 chapters is quite different in style from the last 27 which also appear to have been written post exile- may be 100 years later so the consensus is that there were two writers.

The first Isaiah does not hold back from criticising Judah – for in his time the Holy Land was divided into Israel and Judah and his call is to Judah. He also writes movingly about his call. For those of us who have received a call to ordination this is particularly moving as it is read at all ordination services.

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵ “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

It is right that it is part of ordination for the knowledge of our own humility and unworthiness is one of the most important attributes for a priest.

So we know that Isaiah received a clear calling- but if you read chapter 6 you realise that the first thing Isaiah is told is that people will not listen to him! How annoying! He is quoted by Jesus in Mark 4 "They may be seeing but never perceiving they hear but never understand" – the total dread of a preacher!!

I hope that I have convinced you to read Isaiah, the final 27 chapters will contain so much that you are familiar with, but for the Jewish readers of the day it would be revolutionary. For it speaks of a God who wants salvation for all people, all nations, and will send His very self in Jesus to defeat evil, defeat death by his offering of Himself.

It also has much to tell us of our calling. For some of us – however reluctantly in my case, it was ordination. For most

of us it is not, but we are all called to proclaim good news for the poor, freedom for the imprisoned and sight to the blind.... We are the body of Christ here on earth.

But are we called to be prophetic? Richard Ruhr writes

A prophet is one who keeps God free for people and who keeps people free for God. Both of these are much needed and vital tasks. Without the educated gift of prophecy, God almost always becomes imprisoned and made inaccessible, taught that sacrifice and rituals are the only way to approach God. Isaiah and the other prophets spend much of their time destroying and dismissing these barriers and trying to create "a straight highway to God" (Matthew 3:3). Both John the Baptist and Jesus tried to free God for the people, and it got them killed.

The other half of the prophet's job is to keep people free for God. We get trapped in chains of guilt and legalism, focusing on our imperfect church attendance and inability to live up to the law's standard. Our job is to love others the way God has loved us. Richard writes and I personally have experienced God's unearned love again and again. God has persistently broken the rules to love me at the level I needed, could receive, and was able to understand throughout my life. The magnanimous nature of divine love keeps liberating me at deeper levels, and then I think that newly discovered level of love is the deepest. But it's a journey that never stops giving. Why wouldn't everybody

want that? Like Isaiah, like Jesus, like the other prophets we will not find our way easy, we may have to suffer for our faith, but we will have the joy of knowing that we are part of God's plan of salvation for the world and we are loved, unique and precious in His eyes as we try to free God for the people- free God of their creation of their

preconceptions and fear, and free people from guilt, sin and death by our gracious hospitality, unconditional love and generous self-giving in the image of Jesus Christ the new Isaiah, the total self-giving of God, and love incarnate.
Amen