

Some thoughts on the Lectionary Readings for the second service – Year A, Trinity Sunday

Lectionary Readings: **Isaiah 6: 1-8**
 Psalms 93; 150
 John 16: 5-15

I really should look ahead. In sharing thoughts on the readings for Pentecost I quoted from both Isaiah 6 and John 16 – not realising that they were the lectionary readings for Trinity Sunday!

Psalm 93 reminds us of the majesty of the Lord. Throughout the Old Testament Yahweh is spoken of or written about in terms of awe and wonder. Remember how Moses first encountered God in the burning bush – with the instruction to remove his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. After the Exodus, when leading the Israelites in the desert, Moses went up the mountain of the Lord, a mountain wreathed in smoke and fire. When he came back to the encamped Israelites some of the glory of the Lord had passed onto him and he had to cover his face when in the company of others – it glowed with the glory of God.

It was not a common event for people to see the Lord.

The Lord was Holy; the Lord still is Holy.

I used to describe a tea service, kept in a front-room cupboard - under the bookcase, as ‘holy’. It was only used for special occasions!

That description, holy, implies a separation from day to day things; something holy is set aside for special use.

“Holiness adorns your house for endless days” – the final words of Psalm 93.

Psalm 150 is full of praise.

Praise Him where He is; praise Him in His creation; praise Him for what He has done; praise Him for who He is. The psalmist’s instruction is to praise Him in every possible way – with trumpet, harp lyre, tambourine and dancing; with strings and woodwind instruments, cymbals and resounding cymbals. Quite an orchestra!

In the penultimate verse the psalmist says: *“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord”*.

It is praise that greets Isaiah in his commission vision. He is in a temple building, he sees the Lord *“high and exalted, seated on a throne”* and he sees, flying above the throne, the two seraphim, calling to each other:

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

Their praise was enough to shake the doorposts and thresholds and we are told the temple was filled with smoke.

What was the immediate effect on Isaiah?

He was terrified and thought that a calamity had fallen on him. He was terrified because he had seen the Lord.

As usual – questions, with no proffered answers!

What are our reactions on coming into “the presence of the Lord”?

Are we filled with awe, like Isaiah, because we sense the Holiness of God or do we rather view Him as a just a benevolent, loving, heavenly father?

Isaiah was also terrified because, in God’s presence, he saw himself as *a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips*.

Do we similarly have any sense of ‘sin’?

Remember, from last week’s reading, those early Jewish converts who heard Peter’s sermon at Pentecost. Being convinced, by what they heard, that Jesus was the long expected Messiah and that they were responsible for His death they were *“cut to the heart”*. Asking Peter what they should do they were told to *“Repent and be baptised”*.

We include prayers of confession in all our services but how deeply do we feel our faults and failures?

In the 1831 Collection of Hymns for the use of the people called Methodists there are sections headed:

“Praying for Repentance”; “For Mourners Convinced of Sin”; “For Persons Convinced of Backsliding”; “Seeking for Full Redemption”.

In the 1933 hymn book we find three “wider” sections: “Repentance and Forgiveness”; “Faith and Regeneration”; “Temptation and Conflict”.

In Singing the Faith the major sections appear to be: “Repentance and Forgiveness”; “Conversion and New Life”.

As time has passed has the emphasis changed and if so do we need to be more retrospective today?

Woe to me! I am ruined was Isaiah's cry – because of his “unclean lips”. In the vision a seraphim takes a piece of burning coal from the altar, flies to Isaiah and places the coal on his lips. He is told that this action has taken away his guilt – his sin has been atoned for. To atone for means to make amends or to make reparation but the consequences of the sin have not necessarily been removed. The sin may have been forgiven but it has left its mark.

Isaiah was forgiven – his guilt removed and his sin atoned for. This was followed by a question, not asked by the seraphim but by the Lord Himself – a question which explains the very reason for Isaiah having this vision.

Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?

Isaiah responds (was it an instant response?);

Here am I. Send me!

He becomes one of the great Old Testament Prophets – open to and led by the Spirit of God.

Our Gospel reading has Jesus speaking to His disciples about the Advocate, the Holy Spirit who will come to them only after He has ‘gone away’. This week we have been considering the Trinity and our thoughts come together in the final verses of this reading from John 16:

¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.

All that belongs to the Father is mine.

Jesus is not the Father and the Father is not Jesus, but as Jesus has expressed it elsewhere “they are one”!

The Spirit receives from Jesus who shares in all that belongs to the Father and it is the Spirit who guides us day by day through our lives.

Peter, in that Pentecost sermon, promises the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who repent and are baptised into Jesus name.

As they received and as we receive the Holy Spirit there is union with the Father and with Jesus the Son.

Isaiah answered the call. The call is there today, for each one of us.

Perhaps the question should move on from “*Who will go for us?*” to “***Where do we go and what do we do?***”

Behold the servant of the Lord!
I wait thy guiding eye to feel,
To hear and keep thy every word,
To prove and do thy perfect will,
Joyful from my own works to cease,
Glad to fulfil all righteousness.

Me if thy grace vouchsafe to use,
Meanest of all thy creatures, me,
The deed, the time, the manner choose;
Let all my fruit be found of thee;
Let all my works in thee be wrought,
By thee to full perfection brought.

My every weak though good design
O'errule or change, as seems thee meet;
Jesus, let all my work be thine!
Thy work, O Lord, is all complete,
And pleasing in thy Father's sight;
Thou only hast done all things right.

Here then to thee thine own I leave;
Mould as thou wilt thy passive clay;
But let me all thy stamp receive,
But let me all thy words obey,
Serve with a single heart and eye,
And to thy glory live and die.

Charles Wesley