

Sermon for Baldock/Bygrave Trinity 3 070719 Isaiah 66:10-14; Luke 10:1-11.16-20

In the name of ...

I read recently that Isaiah is in the top five most popular books in the OT. It is very beautifully written with some very memorable verses and its prophecies promise much including, of course, the wonderful good news of the Messiah. I will quote a few specific verses during this sermon.

In Chapter 6 the prophet heard God's call: *Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?* His response was simply: *Here I am. Send me.* (Isaiah 6:8) These prophecies were made at a time of destruction and devastation. God's people were being driven out of their homes, living as refugees, longing to return.

In Chapter 40 Isaiah offers words of consolation for the people now and promise for the future: *Comfort, comfort my people. Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.* (Isaiah 40:1,3)

The promise describes a community transformed, with a new kind of ruler, who will be called: *Wonderful, counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* The characteristics of the reign are to be justice and fairness, wisdom and understanding. (Isaiah 9, 6-7)

Isaiah continues throughout with the same message: among all the devastation, suffering and hardship that his people were enduring, God will comfort his people so that their hearts can rejoice and the people flourish. *As a mother comforts her child so I will comfort you* (Isaiah 66:13)-a verse in today's reading, the final chapter of the book.

At the very start of his ministry, Jesus cited a passage a verse (Isaiah 61:1) which is recorded in Luke's gospel (Luke 4:18): *The spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.* Jesus lived and breathed that message all through his ministerial life. He healed, he forgave, he challenged injustice and as we heard in today's gospel he sent out 70 of his disciples with the task of preparing for his own ministry. Wherever they go, they must preach peace and let the people know that God's reign is very near. They are, if you like, kindling that flame which touched Isaiah. (Isaiah 6:6-7) They are kindling that flame in the hearts of all who welcome them.

That fire has burned in the hearts of so many people ever since. The words of Isaiah have the same power today as they had 2000 years ago when the first disciples responded to Jesus' call and indeed when they were first used nearly 3000 years ago.

What has all of this to do with us today?

Well, as Jesus' disciples today, we are like the 70; we are given the task of preparing the way, opening people's hearts to the reality of a meeting with Jesus. We are challenged to offer the promise of lives being transformed, a world renewed. Then we can share the joy as we see the fire take hold in people's hearts.

Where and how is God sending you, sending me, now? This may change and grow as our faith develops, as our lives continue. Of course your call will not be my call. And each of your calls will be different from each other. We are all made in God's image but we are all unique and our call is matched to our own God-given gifts and our life experience.

It is a discipline that we should all observe regularly. To examine our faith lives, pray and consider what it is that God wants of us at this particular time. Perhaps you are doing this already in an informal way? Using the gifts and experience you have to further God's kingdom. This could be in your working life, or as part of the church or the community in which you live. You can witness in many small ways, as a parent, using skills of listening, child-care, relating to elderly people, visiting the housebound.

Maybe you read in church or you lead prayers or you help with Messy Church or you visit on behalf of the church or you represent the church in the community?

Of course, your gifts may be quite different from these and it could also be that others are better at recognising our gifts than we are ourselves?

Try to spend some time in the next week or so thinking and praying about this. Perhaps you could get together with someone else so that you can support each other as you reflect? Ponder the opportunities you have had to bring God's comfort and promise, his transformation and hope to others. Give thanks for these. Consider what you have learned about God's love and the gifts that you have to offer.

And when you hear God's call: *Whom shall I send, who will go for us?* what will be your response?

Amen.

Elizabeth Bunker
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