

Second Sunday of Epiphany – 9am Wesley – 19<sup>th</sup> January 2014

Readings: Isaiah 49:1-7 & John 1:35-42

Theme: “Called by God”

Text: “I will give you as a light to the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” Isa 49:6b

Introduction

I love this time in the Biblical/Lectionary Year as we have passages that seem so relevant for us today. Both passages set down for today talk about the ‘calling’ of people or of a nation and follow closely from the readings of last Sunday. Let us take a few moments to reflect on the readings and then to reflect a little closer to home, on ourselves.

Isaiah 49:1-7

Last Sunday we had the first of the Servant Songs from Isaiah 42:1-9 and it was God’s voice saying: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights” (Isa 42:1). The first Servant Song celebrates the patient, nonviolent, merciful ministry of the Servant who faithfully brings forth justice without breaking a ‘bruised reed’ or quenching ‘a dimly burning wick’. Word pictures for a style of leadership that enables the ‘downtrodden’ to be lifted up and supported and cared for. Quite a different style of leadership from the warring kings of Israel and Judah that had led to military catastrophes that still seem to plague that part of the world. Are we slow learners about what God requires of us? An interesting rhetorical question!

In the Servant Song today, we hear the Servant speaking to the peoples of the ‘islands’ or the ‘coastlands’, a word picture for those along the eastern Mediterranean shores (modern day Israel, Lebanon and Syria as well as unspecified ‘distant nations’). God has pre-ordained this Servant, which is called ‘Israel’ in the passage. Scholars discuss whether this refers to the nation or an individual – this is not answered with any certainty. What is clear is that the Servant is called and supported by God.

God speaks to the Servant and says: “I will make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” (vs 6b)

It is into this aspect that as Christians we see Christ as the fulfiller of the Isaiah prophecies of which the Servant Songs are a part. It is he who ‘was despised and abhorred by the nation’ yet becomes the fulfiller of what God requires.

John 1:35-42

In our Gospel reading we have the ‘follow up’ to Jesus’ baptism, which was central to our readings last week.

John now pushes his disciples to go and ‘check out’ this Jesus.

Unspoken, but presumed, is the fact that John the Baptist has done his job of preparing the way for the one who is to come and now steps back, handing over his disciples to the promised of God, the Messiah. Think of John – how hard must have that been having felt called by God. Yet on the other side, he must have known that he had done his job and was now able to accept that through what had happened at Jesus’ baptism, John could relinquish the ‘reins’, so to speak, and direct people to Jesus. So often we want to hold onto the past, we say ‘we’ve always done it like this, therefore that is right’ and we have an ownership which may not help the work that God has for us and others. A difficult one – when to hang on and when to let go. We need guidance and certainly John the Baptist knew when to let go and where to guide people to.

The second thing that struck me in this passage was Andrew's response to Jesus. We read in verse 41

'The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him 'We have found the Messiah.' And he brought him to Jesus.

Obviously there had been teaching by John prior to this but Andrew's response in a sense 'blows me away'. Here the immediate response, no questions asked, is to take another to Jesus.

Jesus renames Simon, 'Cephas', which translates to Peter and means 'rock'. What was Jesus thinking? Peter was anything but a rock, he was more like 'jelly' wobbling all over the place. Not good judgement by Jesus as he begins calling his disciples! Or was it to show what God could do with some-one to change their whole being?

#### Where do we fit in to all this?

There is a wonderful poem attributed to Teresa of Avila, a sixteenth century mystic, composed by her in a letter sent to her nuns towards the end of her life encouraging them to live out the faith to which they were called.

You may well have heard it before but it is worth re-telling as a challenge for ourselves:

"Christ has no body now on earth but yours,  
no hands but yours, no feet but yours.  
Yours are the eyes through which to look out Christ's  
compassion to the world;  
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good.  
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless men and women now."

It never ceases to amaze me, the diversity of the church, the huge variations in viewpoints and yet the way the church continues being called and blessed by God. Sometime I/we are pretty hopeless in our faith but God still uses us in amazing ways. Jesus calling Peter to be the foundation stone of the early church gives me hope when I am despondent about my own faith and the direction of the Uniting Church. In this season of Epiphany, may we see our lives and the life of the world in the light of the glory of God, in which all our aspirations are lifted up and returned to us in forms we never would have imagined.

God says: "I will give you as a light to the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."