

Isaiah 65 : 17-25

A Song of Isaiah

2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13

Luke 21:5-19

These sermon notes were prepared before the sermon was delivered and so do not transcribe the actual sermon word for word

Isaiah gives us a vision of the activity of God, and it is a vision that is well worth spending some time contemplating.

Much of our theology, our understanding of God, is based on God the creator and the primary reference text is invariably the book of Genesis.

Those who read the text literally believe that God created everything in 7 days and 'it was good', and they then have various reasons for explaining why it is not so good in the present. Such a theology is still quite widespread; a Gallup poll reported that the percentage of people in the U.S. who believe in a strict interpretation of creationism was 40% in 2010

Isaiah, in today's reading is speaking from a very different place of understanding, a different depth of perception; and unlike the literalist view of Genesis, Isaiah perceives creation and God's creative activity as a process, and in progress.

And the vision of creation that Isaiah sees and speaks of is so different from the status quo that it can only be described as "*new heavens and a new earth*".

There is a parallel in respect of the difference Isaiah perceives with resurrection, where the appearance of Jesus is so different that initially he is not recognised.

Isaiah is not speaking of a vision of utopia, rather he speaks of the reality that is the potential for tomorrow, he speaks of direction, orientation, and the arrow of life's movement.

We might consider well the question, where do we find Isaiah today; do we still have holders of the divine vision in the present age?

Such questions give us an opportunity to put life into perspective and consider the influences and the environments that shape our own lives.

The prophetic vision, the perception of Isaiah; is it taught in our schools and universities; is it debated and brought into law through parliaments; is it made manifest in our churches and religious institutions?

This week we received an email from the Anglican Church's Provincial Council of Western Australia that provided a ruling on a synod resolution:

The Provincial Council's decision was based on the opinion that the resolution passed by the Diocese of Perth was capable of being interpreted as being contrary to the Fundamental Declarations and Ruling Principles of the Anglican Church of Australia.

To add to our line of questions, is Isaiah's prophetic vision held within *the Fundamental Declarations and Ruling Principles of the Anglican Church of Australia*?

The answer, so far, to all the above is most probably 'No'; for I doubt any of us would see these shaping influences as being holders of that vision that Isaiah speaks of.

There is however a place in which Isaiah's vision is held;
 Deep within the Body of Christ
 Echoed in the murmur of silent prayer
 Glimpsed in the incantations that accompany the waving of lights in the temple
 Honoured in the washing of feet at the entrance to the mosque
 Sought for in the scrolls of the Torah as they are paraded in the synagogue.

A place of prophetic vision is woven into the DNA of all humanity and we have to work harder to ignore it than we do to actually encounter it.

The opening voice of Isaiah's prophesy says: "*I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. 18 But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating.*"

"*I am about to create*" suggests for us that the potential, the possibility, of a new creation is ever imminent.

The idea of 'tipping points' can be helpful in trying to picture the reality of the "*I am about to create*" moment that recreates tomorrow.

By adding bit-by-bit to one side of the scales we never really know when, or what piece will actually cause the scales to tip.

If we add a piece and then take away a piece, nothing happens. If we fail to add anything, again nothing happens. However, if we do add something, that one piece might be the one that causes the scales to tip.

The principle is summed up in a book title: ***The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*** [ISBN 0-316-31696-2] is a book by Malcolm Gladwell, first published by Little Brown in 2000.]

The realisation of Isaiah's vision is perhaps a 'tipping point' that Isaiah sees, and that is still in the process of "*I am about to create*".

The second reading gives us more to contemplate as we consider our part in tipping the world into a Divine new creation.

Paul writes letters of encouragement to the churches he has visited, and he speaks of himself as an example that they should imitate.

We might consider; what is the example we set for others to imitate?

What is it that we are adding to the scales that will bring about “*new heavens and a new earth*”?

And equally helpful, who gives us the example that we seek to imitate?

These are real questions that the scriptures ask us to reflect on, for they have very worthwhile answers and their answers can bring about changes within ourselves.

My reading of the letter from the provincial council is that they seek to be imitators of the “*Fundamental Declarations and Ruling Principles of the Anglican Church of Australia*”.

There are however other possibilities; Christ and Paul provide us with easier and less complicated examples.

When you have some time, and a quiet place to sit and be still, you might like to read again the second reading from 2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13. In reading it, seek to find yourself in the reading, and then find the “Paul” within yourself, for he is somewhere in your DNA, inhabiting your inner landscape.

There you will find, Paul imitating Christ, imitating Isaiah and the Divine activity of creation.

It is an exercise that is worth enduring with, you will likely be distracted at the first and even at further attempts, but endure.

The gospel today encourages us: “*By your endurance you will gain your souls.*”

To finish let’s look again at the front page of our AGM report for this year:

The future is not a result of choices among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created - created first in the mind and will, created next in activity.

The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating.

*The paths are not to be found, but made,
and the activity of making them,
changes both the maker and the destination.*

(Deborah James)

Peace be with You