

19 January 2014 Second Sunday after Epiphany Sermon

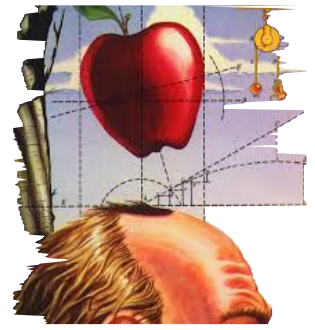
Isaiah 49: 1-7

Psalm 40: 1-11

1 Corinthians 1: 1-9

John 1:29-42

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



Isaiah's prophetic voice is a voice of Divine vision. And it is the same "Word" that is enfleshed in the nativity of Christ.

It is perhaps the true voice of humanity, a voice, a Word that each and all can echo.

However wherever and whenever, that voice is spoken it encounters a struggle. It encounters an outward struggle, one that leads to crucifixion; and, as we see in the first reading, it also encounters an inner struggle, an inner questioning, such that Isaiah perceives himself as "*one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers*".

Both these outward and inner struggles are universal phenomena, they are like the force of gravity, they weigh us down and restrict our freedom, our ability to rise up...

"All the natural movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity. Grace is the only exception. Grace fills empty spaces, but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it, and it is grace itself which makes this void. The imagination is continually at work filling up all the fissures through which grace might pass."

[Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*]

Back in Isaiah's time, and even long before, those who glimpsed God had invented an elaborate process to avoid the struggle with this gravitational force, they created religious formulas, rituals and laws to supposedly counter the forces of worldly gravity; but such a creation, is only avoidance and has only created a worldly delusion, a pretence that the force of gravity has been overcome.

The prophet sees through this elaborate delusion, Christ sees through it and opens us to the struggle toward crucifixion...

"When I think of the Crucifixion, I commit the sin of envy." [Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*]

Isaiah saw beyond the religious rituals and laws, he saw and spoke a truth, for he knew himself as subject to the force of worldly gravity and was prepared to struggle with it. That struggle was empowered by a deeper truth; he knew he was called before he was born, he was known outside of and beyond any religious practice; and he knew that in his very being God could be glorified.

"The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. 2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. 3 And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."

Isaiah gives voice to his struggle with the force of gravity

"I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the LORD, and my reward with my God."

And Isaiah knew his place in the world, his participation in humanity; his very life was an arrow that was not bounded by the religious fabrications of his tradition, it was much more than that:

“my God has become my strength & he says, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.””

The psalm today poetically speaks, or sings of this very same struggle, the struggle we now encounter in our post-nativity world.

1 I waited patiently for the Lord: and he inclined to me and heard my cry.

As we encounter the force of gravity and engage the struggle, we are reminded to stay grounded in prayer.

2 He brought me up from the pit of roaring waters, out of the mire and clay: and set my feet upon a rock, and made firm my foothold.

Being ‘brought up’ is the movement that is counter to that of worldly gravity.

3 And he has put a new song in my mouth: even a song of thanksgiving to our God.

The new song is not the carols fabricated in our tradition, rather it is the voice that is enfleshed in the nativity, a new Word, that is our gift.

4 Many shall see it and fear: and shall put their trust in the Lord.

Here the struggle is acknowledged... *Many shall see it and fear*

5 Blessed are those who have made the Lord their hope:

who have not turned to the proud, or to those who wander in deceit.

And with the struggle acknowledged – so too the blessing of staying with the struggle

6 O Lord my God, great are the wonderful things which you have done, and your thoughts which are towards us: there is none to be compared with you;

Verse six sits in the centre of the psalm, it speaks of thanksgiving

And it acknowledges the activity of God, not the word of God but rather *the wonderful things which you have done.*

Thanksgiving and action are also central to our encounter with the prophetic struggle.

7 Were I to declare them and speak of them: they are more than I am able to express.

The vision, the enfleshed Word, and so too the enfleshed world is more than a voice can express; this is the reality known by the prophets and made manifest ‘in Christ’. It is not what we may say, rather our encounter with struggle will be found in what we do.

8 Sacrifice and offering you do not desire: but my ears you have marked for obedience;

9 Burnt-offering and sin-offering you have not required: then said I, Lo, I come.

Together these two verses underline each other; religious rituals and laws are not what is required, that is only a delusion for those who attend the synagogue; and is not the activity that will lift us beyond the force of worldly gravity.

*10 In the scroll of the book it is written of me, that I should do your will:
O my God, I long to do it, your law delights my heart.*

Another underlining of living our life with a Divine orientation; living into the very image of God.

The prophetic knowing, that delights in the promise of that comes from living in the Divine truth. We are called to be enfleshed in the Divine Word, to find our nativity; not to be weighed down by the fear, the weight of forces unseen; rather we are called to ‘arise and shine for your light has come’...

O my God, I long to do it, your law delights my heart.

One final quote from Simon Weil that encourages us to go into this prophetic struggle: “If we go down into ourselves, we find that we possess exactly what we desire.”

*11 I have declared your righteousness in the great congregation:
I have not restrained my lips, O Lord, and that you know.*