

Third Sunday after Epiphany 22 January 2017

[Isaiah 9: 1-4; Psalm 27: 1-10; 1Cor 1: 10-18; Matthew 4:12-25](#) Vanderbilt

[Epiphany 2A3 January 22 2017](#) Textweek

The three readings we have today each provide an opportunity for exploration in their own right, and they each have a quite different angle of engagement.

Now rather than sitting through three sermons, we might look briefly at the first two readings and hopefully find at least a starting point for further reflection and then we can spend a little more time looking at the gospel.

Isaiah heralds a new beginning, the inauguration of new potential;

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined.”

As we are just getting into 2017 we might see an invitation here to ask ourselves if we have seen a great light.

We might first of all look back to 2016 and see if we can identify with Isaiah’s description; did we experience a light shining into the ‘darkness’ of our journey.

Perhaps we are not aware of the darkness of our journey; in which case we only need turn on the ‘News’.

We could also look forwards into the year ahead and become aware of the path we are walking and then acknowledge the potential for light; we might ask what we ourselves would be seeking in order to live a more enlightened life.

And of course we can also do the ‘Aussie’ thing; call the “*great light*” sunshine and just head for the beach.

In the next verse Isaiah continues with

“You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest.”

And once again we can reflect for ourselves on the life we live and the purpose that gives shape to our life; do we ‘multiply’ and ‘increase’ the joy of peoples; and in what do we

“rejoice... as with joy at the harvest”?

The first reading gives us an opportunity to engage for ourselves the promise that comes with each New Year, and with each new day; a promise that is made real when we are enlightened.

Almost as an aside, the first lines of the Psalm, again reference ‘light’

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?: the Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”;

and in speaking these words, even using them as a repetitive mantra, we might find ourselves once again engaging questions that will take us beyond the fears of the everyday.

In the second reading the appeal of Paul in his letter to the Corinthians is on a completely different tack; and so it engages us quite differently.

We, the Church of St Paul's, might read Paul's letter as a reminder to us as we contemplate discerning a new rector in 2017.

As Paul addresses the Church we might hear him addressing us: and asking "that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose."

Although on a different tack to the first reading, for us we can link Paul's letter to the inauguration of a new chapter in the life of St Paul's and so be reminded that it is **together** that we seek a new 'light', a new illumination of the path we walk together.

In the spirit of inaugurations, we might also borrow from JFK's inauguration speech and 'ask not what your new rector can do for you; ask what you can do for your new rector'.

For us, at this time, the reading offers wisdom: be in agreement, be united and of the same mind and purpose; but at the same time be aware of what the promise of new light holds; and we should not ask anything more than we are willing to give.

Now to the gospel and obviously Matthew is working hard to let his Jewish audience know that Jesus is the expected Messiah of their Hebraic tradition; Matthew confirms that Jesus is the one Isaiah speaks of and hence the cameo he paints and his quoting from the same first reading that we heard today.

Like us, Matthew finds it hard to let go, he finds it hard to walk a different path; he's been brought up on a particular path and he knows, and is familiar, with his journey. Rather than seeing Jesus as a 'great light', an inauguration of a new and more enlightened possibility; Matthew wants to hold on to the tradition that he is comfortable with, the tradition he 'knows'.

Now with that qualification of the gospel text, there are still some really interesting aspects of the gospel that are largely overlooked; and these serve to encourage us beyond the insights of the gospel writer himself.

If we begin with Jesus, in Isaiah's terms, as a 'great light' to those "*people who walked in darkness*"; then we see a new day dawning, a new enlightenment and something not seen or expected.

Once again we are looking at the inauguration of a new beginning; and for us in 2017 that is an amazingly relevant process for us to reflect on.

Brexit and Trump are inaugurations of a new beginning that will take shape this year; and our seeking a new rector is another inauguration that will take shape and that we will give shape to this year.

So what do we glean from looking at the gospel?

One interesting aspect is the not-so-orthodox similarity that Jesus has with us and with John the Baptist;

“Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee.”

Was it fear, or was it a need to pause and think again that prompted Jesus to ‘withdraw’? Whatever the answer there is a recognisable human engagement with what is going on in the world, rather than a comic superhuman approach to the bad news of the world.

And then, after bringing the words of Isaiah into the frame, we hear

“17 From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near"”;

we hear that Jesus proclaims the very same message as John was proclaiming before his arrest.

Jesus continues the work of enlightenment, without fear.

Next we have the well-known walk by the Sea of Galilee and the calling of the disciples; so well known that we never bother to think about it.

Two brothers are called and follow; then we have two other brothers and their father; however only the brothers are called;

“22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him”;
why was the father not called?

If you look at the age demographics associated with Brexit, and with the election of Donald Trump what is evident is that both were supported more by older people rather than young voters in percentage terms.

There are a number of reasons to explain the phenomenon, including the fact that young voters are less bothered to actually vote; however there is also another reason and that was well captured by Trump’s advertising jingle “Make America great Again”; the ‘again’ appeals to those who look back to the ‘good old days’; and mostly that is an orientation commonly associated with older people.

What we see in the gospel narrative, and what takes us beyond the writer, who also looked back to his tradition to make sense of Jesus; what we see however is an illustration that we need a forward orientation for enlightenment.

This is not an actual account of events, again it is illustrative, and we are not being told that Jesus is someone to be followed by young brothers, rather we see that those who look forward, those who stand side-by-side with another are the ones that can follow, and that will follow the *Great light* that will change the path we walk.

Matthew has tried to shoehorn Jesus into the place of Messiah expected by those walking in darkness; rather Jesus is a light for all who seek a tomorrow that is birthed on a different promise altogether.

May 2017 be our year of looking forward, and may we also appreciate that it is an orientation for old and young alike.

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