

Bennochy Church: 22nd April 2012

We need the visionaries, those who look deep into the future and proclaim possible ways ahead. There is the inventor who creates the future, where new technologies become integral to how we live our lives. Think of a world without any mobile phones! There are people who read the signs of the time and declare that if we carry on down this particular road, this is what is going to happen. This is not predicting the future; it is about seeing the logical consequences and outcomes of our actions, both as individuals and as a society, for example global warming. There is many a politician and commentator who claim to be a good at sorting the future! The local elections are coming up. Read any political manifesto!

There are also those moments from history where we do not learn from the past. History repeats itself and the same mistakes are made. The people of God down through the centuries, continually failed to obey God, at some points there were great moments of repentance, but then they would lapse into their old ways and the lessons of the past would be ignored. One short poem goes like this, *"History repeats itself. Has to. No-one listens"* (Steve Turner). So historians use the past as a guide for the future.

We need visionaries and the bible is full of them. The call of the prophet Isaiah came in the year king Uzzai died, about 740 BC. The prophet lived in Jerusalem shortly before its capture by the

Babylonians in 721BC. After which the leaders were taken into exile. There is an important message here for us all. God calls people. It may not be contained in such a dramatic vision, but God calls people to listen to his voice, walk in his ways and speak his truth. Read the life of Isaiah, who for the next 40 years speaks the word of God to the people or any prophet, and you will find the challenge of responding to the call of God. Are we are willing to open our ears, turn in the right direction and say what will often be rejected and unpopular?

Isaiah was probably in the Jerusalem Temple and some act of worship / sacrifice or celebration is in progress and God uses that event to speak to the prophet. In response to his vision and the glory of God, Isaiah says there is no hope for me! How can I look upon the face the God and live? For him, this is a 'get down on your knees' moment! I am not worthy of this and I live among a people who are not worthy either. Can we appreciate this contrast? On the one hand the glory of God and all that entailed and on the other, he calls **us**. That is the stark reality of faith, the God of incarnation who came to live as man and the God of Easter who died for the forgiveness of his creation, calls **us**. If we get that, then we understand something of the reaction of Isaiah to the vision from God all those centuries ago.

What happens next must have been a huge shock to the prophet. Here is no condemnation here but forgiveness, through what to us is a strange enacted parable of cleansing;

burning coals are brought forward and touch the prophet's lips. This act foreshadows Easter. Christ is that burning coal and through his death and resurrection he touches our lives as we are cleansed. It is like the prophet being baptised, a sacramental act offered for the forgiveness of sins.

"Whom shall I send?", God asks. How else could Isaiah answer?

"Here I am, send me"

The disciples had a similar experience after the death of Jesus. They saw, talked, possibly touched and ate with the risen Christ. There's was a vision of flesh and blood. He said to them, *"You are my witnesses of these things"*.

'Whom shall I send?' I am sure the disciples would have answered as Isaiah did, 'send us'!

Our vision is our experience of God in our lives. That is what makes us witnesses. Whether a powerful dream or a still small voice, it does not matter. What does matter, is our response to God, for we cannot go to the ends of the earth for him, unless we have first said, *'Here I am, send me'*. Amen

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