



March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

Welcome

8th Sunday after Trinity - 7th August 2022

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 572117 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

There has been a rise in CV-19 cases locally. *We are trying to move towards normality whilst keeping people safe. Mask wearing is optional. Respect people's space. Washing hands is a good idea. Wine offered (for those wishing it). Dipping is not recommended.*

~ Services with Social Distancing ~

St Peter's Sundays 8am & 11am; Wednesdays 10am

St Mary's Sundays 9.15am ~ St John's Sundays 9.30am; Tuesdays 10am

St Wendreda's Sundays 11am

Prayer, Collect, for this week

O God, on whom our faith rests secure and whose kingdom we await, sustain us by word and sacrament and keep us alert for the coming of the Son of Man, that we may welcome him without delay. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, and for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

God, our thief, you steal from us our dead complacent hearts and kindle a new flame: take from our hands the burden of worthless things, and make them ready to receive a greater gift: the love of a Servant King; through Jesus Christ, the Son of Man. Amen.

Old Testament Isaiah 1 v1 & 10-20

The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt-offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation— I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Gospel of Luke 12 v32-40

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

'Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. 'But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.'

Meditation

For many it seems foolhardy and incredible to take notice of the advice of an ancient document (e.g. the Book of Isaiah) some 2800 years old, when surely there are better informed and more relevant places for values or advice.

The name Isaiah means, appropriately, 'Yahweh saves', he preaches the message of Yahweh in Jerusalem (with the Temple) in changing and troubled times, from about 740BC for over 40 years. The first word of the book of Isaiah makes an important point; prophecy is a **vision**. The Prophets of the Old Testament were not regarded as deep thinkers who delivered oracles out of their own reflections; they were people to whom Yahweh revealed particular truths. The prophet was, therefore, one who 'saw' what other people could not see.

Isaiah lived in unsettled times in which, after various attempts, the superior power of Assyria finally extinguished the independence of the small states in Syria-Palestine. He belongs to the smaller southern Israelite kingdom centred on Jerusalem, and is around when the northern Kingdom of Israel is ended for good in 721BC by the Assyrians. When the prophet finally retired from the scene the little state of Judah had to all intents and purposes been reduced to the capital, Jerusalem, and was completely dependent on its mighty Assyrian overlord. Forty years before, Isaiah had divined and prophesied that this was what would happen to Judah. His activity seems to have been prompted by four particular periods; 1. a period of vehement social criticism following the death of King Uzziah (747-735BC); 2. a time of War when Isaiah argues unsuccessfully against military alliances (734-732BC); 3. a time of rebellion against the Assyrians when Isaiah counters using the strategy and ideas of other nations, but urges Judah to stand fast to Yahweh's ways, 4. the time of a siege of Jerusalem which seems likely to end in destruction, but is averted by events far away. Isaiah seems to have access to the Kings, so perhaps he has some special position like that of a Privy Councillor, without being a court official but nevertheless having a recognised role that enabled him to continue to commentate and seek to influence social and moral, and military and diplomatic agendas.

Our passage from Isaiah today is a much quoted passage; one of the lessons for Ash Wednesday and allied to headings like the 'Right use of the Sabbath' or 'Godly Worship' and has been said to affirm the futility of outward forms of religion. However, this is cheap and not sound; a large part of the Old Testament deals with festivals and sacrifices; if such outward performances are futile, then all these writings must be rejected and Isaiah set against Deuteronomy and Leviticus as containing a fundamentally different religion. There is only an appearance of proscribing observance of the Sabbath, gatherings for worship and even prayer. So many of the greatest OT figures including Abraham, Moses, Elijah, David and Solomon built altars to offer sacrifice. It is not the case that priests and prophets were at odds over the very existence of the Temple and sacrificial system. Rather, it is saying that Worship, in common with much formal behaviour, has no meaning by itself. It has meaning only as a dramatic symbol of a way of living. Sending flowers is an outward form; if the action represents true love, it is a delightful means of expressing it. But if the flowers are sent by an unfaithful partner as a means of deception, the act is hypocritical and deplorable. No one would conclude that sending flowers is itself a dubious action. This passage, therefore, affirms an important principle; worship can never be justified in its own terms. The fact that it is liturgically correct, or aesthetically pleasing, or lavishly presented avails nothing, important as some of these considerations may be. Worship is an expression of true devotion, otherwise expressed in fidelity, loyalty and just behaviour, or it is nothing. Worship is a means of giving voice, in an hour or so, to a devotion that is a permanent disposition and activity.

‘Multitude of your sacrifices’ indicates self-indulgence as well as the shallow notion that Yahweh would be impressed by mere quantity. The word for sacrifices is a general term, but as the next line refers to whole-offerings, we can infer that peace offerings are meant here.

Peace offerings could be riotous occasions, for, though Yahweh and the priests were given a share, most of the carcass was eaten by the worshipper and his friends; whole offerings were not self-indulgent as the whole carcass was burnt and the worshipers got nothing, but they could still be ostentatious and hypocritical; fat and blood were the parts always offered to Yahweh.

‘When you stretch out your hands.....’ Body language is always interesting. One supposes that in prayer the hands were open and turned upwards, partly to receive, partly to demonstrate that they do not constitute a threat as a clenched fist would. There is nothing wrong with prayer, but if the person is reprehensible in action or attitude, adding prayer to prayer will not help. **‘Blood on your hands’** indicates the precise sin that makes the offerings unacceptable; those addressed are not accused of murder, but injustice. To speak of blood may seem like hyperbole, but injustice to the poor in many societies could well mean death.

So, back to my opening question; what does this say to those who are setting out their stalls to be our next Prime Minister, or to those on the receiving end of military action, or ourselves in our own lives. Perhaps more on this next week, but those who believe in God, who has his values which are not limited to one age and place, may find Isaiah every bit as relevant, challenging and transforming as any contemporary commentator.

God bless, Andrew

Prayers

Almighty God, whose kingdom is everlasting and power infinite: have mercy upon the whole Church; and so rule the heart of your servant Elizabeth, our Queen, and Governor, that she (knowing whose minister she is) may above all things seek thy honour and glory: and that we and all her subjects (duly considering whose authority she has) may faithfully serve, honour and humbly obey her, in You, and for You, according Your blessed word and ordinance, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with You and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, ever one God, world without end. **Amen**

The GENERAL THANKSGIVING

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
we your unworthy servants
give you most humble and hearty thanks
for all your goodness and loving kindness
to us and to all people.
We bless you for our creation, preservation,
and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your immeasurable love
in the redemption of the world
by our Lord Jesus Christ,
for the means of grace,
and for the hope of glory.
And give us, we pray,
such a sense of all your mercies
that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful,
and that we show forth our praise,
not only with our lips but in our lives,
by giving up ourselves to your service,
and by walking before you in holiness
and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit,
be all honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.