

A Reflection on the Fruitfulness of the Word of God

Thus says the Lord: As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out with joy, and be led back in peace; and the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Isaiah 55.10-13

The Prophet Isaiah speaks of the coming among us of the ‘word of God’ – a word with intention and impact and effect: and ‘it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I – God – purpose.’ The fruit of this ‘word’ will be the confirmation of joy and peace. The elements of the earth themselves will burst into song – like the heavens which *declare the glory of God* and the ‘firmament’ which *shows forth his handiwork* at the start of Psalm 19: the effect in us of this ‘word’ will be to awaken within us a ‘new song’ (cf Psalm 96.1).



Does Isaiah mean us to understand that *this* is the genuine purpose and intention of the Torah itself, God’s ‘Law’? Certainly, he sees the commandments of God as a clarification of the way by which God’s original purpose in Creation – that the Creation should be *beautiful* and *fruitful* – is brought to completion, even after the effects within it of our own wilfulness and refusal to honour the calling of God. Such a perception makes sense of the theme in so much of the Prophet’s own vision which describes the lifting from us of burdens and oppression, and the establishment not only of justice and peace, but of a kind of freedom (or *liberation*) of spirit. The ‘Day of the Lord’ will be the day on which all things are reconciled and put right, and our hope and our joy are *made complete*.

To that extent, the ‘word’ which is described by Isaiah comes very close in meaning and content to ‘The Word’ (in Greek, the ‘*Logos*’ of God) who is *Jesus Christ himself* – the One in whom meaning and purpose are clarified and confirmed, the One by whom the reconciling and liberating Power of God takes definitive effect in the world to *overcome evil* and to *make all things new* (cf Revelation 21.5).

Christian faith trusts that it is by means of Jesus Christ’s humbling of self to come into the world that we can be ‘saved’ – that the distortions in the Creation can be smoothed out and *put right*. But Jesus Christ, the Living Word (cf John 1.1-18), does not simply come among us to be with us. He comes, that we may be *brought back into the embrace of God* – and his return to God the Father, commemorated in the Ascension and Exaltation of Christ at the right hand of God the Father in eternal splendour and Glory, is every bit as important as his *coming from God in the first place*, accomplishing that which God purposes – accomplishing that which God has purposed and intended *from the beginning of time*.

When he speaks in this way of a ‘word’ from God, all these multiple layers of meaning resonate together with each other, confirming each other’s intention and meaning: the ‘word’ which is the means by which Creation was established in the first place (‘God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light’; Genesis 1.3); the ‘word’ which is the Torah or the commandment of God by which we know and understand the value system of the kingdom of God; the ‘word’ which is inspired by the Spirit of God speaking through the prophets, and drawing forth from the written word a deeper understanding and insight; finally ‘The Word’ who is Jesus Christ – the word in living form, the Presence among us of God himself – who will return to God, not *empty*, but with arms filled with the *whole of the Creation* brought back into right relationship with God.

All of this, the Prophet Isaiah can see and perceive. As we meditate on the word of God – on the Torah, on the teaching of the Prophets, on the witness of Jesus Christ himself – may we too come to see and perceive the source of joy and peace. And may we become caught up in the New Song in which the whole Creation gives ecstatic thanks to God. Alleluia! Amen.

The image, of a Choir of Angels by Simon Marmion (c1459, National Gallery London) is copied under Creative Commons Licence CC BY NC ND 4.0.