

TRINITY SUNDAY: JUNE 7th, 2009

Isaiah 6:1-8; Matthew 28:16-20

Isaiah 6:1-8

This reading can seem a little strange to us but in Isaiah's mind its purpose is very simple. Isaiah writes of his call by God as a way of telling his people that God has a plan in mind for his creation and he has received a divine call so that he can participate in what God is wanting to do. The importance of this message comes about through understanding what is going on in the world history around them. It is a time of political and religious turmoil and the people are in danger of losing their way. They have become so caught up in the local and religious politics that God has been moved to the periphery. Isaiah is saying to the people, "You are not going to like what I am going to be saying to you but this message comes from God". Isaiah is bringing a message of God's judgment on the people. He is not carrying out his ministry as a kind of personal whim or because he chooses to be difficult. God is on his throne and is ruling in creation. This judgment has been decreed by God and all Isaiah is doing is taking up his responsibilities as a servant of God. They would be better off getting on with the work of repentance and returning to a life of faithfulness than complaining about the harshness of God's words.

This message is dated to around 735 BC and the point of Isaiah setting a clear date for his call is to say to the people that God acts at specific times and in specific historical situations. God reaches out into history just as he will later on in sending his own Son into world history when he is born under Roman rule.

Isaiah begins by telling the people that he has seen the Lord God and God is seated on his throne. He reigns in power and with great authority and this vision leaves little doubt that God is all powerful and very much in charge. Isaiah does not describe God, just indicates something of God's greatness by describing the hem of his robes and the seraphim who surround him. One cannot help but read this description and have a strong sense of God's mighty power and great glory. His robes flow all the way down from heaven into the Temple's sanctuary, for that is the kind of God he is – in heaven ruling but engaged with his creation.

Isaiah appears before this great vision as an unclean man, a sinner who cannot possibly survive such an encounter. He describes God as his King and this is exactly how God's children should appear before the throne of glory: Obedient, humble, in a state of worship and seeking the protection of one who is greater and more powerful.

The prophet begins by acknowledging himself as being a man of "unclean lips" just as the people themselves are an unclean people and because of their sins they cannot join in the heavenly worship. But just as he is almost overwhelmed by his sinfulness, an angel comes down and cleanses him of his sins, making him clean. This is a great message of hope. There are only two states for a human being before God. They can either stand in a state of grace or stand under God's judgment. One leads to life the other to death. And it is by the grace of God that the gift of forgiveness is offered. Now that Isaiah is cleansed of his sins, he is invited to join in the heavenly assembly.

The point is clear: it is only by being freed from sin that a person can hear God's call in their lives and only through being forgiven do they have the graces they need to fulfil that vocation. This is more than likely why this reading is given to us on Trinity Sunday, the week after Pentecost. We have an enormous mission before us as individuals and a Church but on our own we can do nothing. On our own we are doomed to failure because of our human sinfulness. The way forward begins with repentance and being forgiven by God. It involves standing humbly before the throne of God, acknowledging him as King and ruler of all, the True God on whom we depend.

Matthew 28:16-20

This appearance of the risen Jesus in Galilee is found only in Matthew's Gospel. In some ways it represents a summary of the whole of the Gospel. Jesus here is the risen Lord, the one who overcame death to be raised to life again and so he is worthy of being worshipped. He is the divine teacher who now commissions his disciples to go out into the world and continue to teach and preach in his name. The authority with which he acted in the past and the authority he uses to commission his disciples for the future comes to him from God. He is the Son of Man and this is important, for he now commissions the disciples to go out into the world and baptize the Gentiles. This is quite a move for the early Church who initially saw that their mission was to the Jewish nation. But God's vision is far greater. The whole of creation stands under God's will and God's plan and the role of the disciples is to do what God wants.

This tough task is made a little easier because of the promise of "Emmanuel" – God with us. This vocation can be fulfilled, not because of the skills and abilities of the disciples but because God is carrying out his own plans in them and through them. In them the mission of Jesus in the world is ongoing. It should not be thought of as being a completely new time. It is God doing what he sent his Son to do only now it is being carried out through those called by his Son.

These disciples who are sent out are the same ones who were earlier chastised as being men of little faith. Now they react differently: they believe. It is to these men of faith that the commission is given to (1) go out (2) and make disciples, to (3) baptize and to (4) teach the nations about God's loving mercy.

The Church is now defined as that community of men and women of faith who move into the world around them engaging all peoples, Jews and Gentiles alike with the message of God's love. They do this by word and by the witness of their own lives. The whole world is now a mission field and everyone who is baptized a missionary. That is what discipleship now means. It is not enough to believe and to live that belief in the privacy of one's own life and own faith community. Believing is going out and sharing. What is to be shared? A read through the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5,6,7) will show the "how" and "what" of the missionary methods.

Today's Gospel tells us clearly that the Father has given all authority to the Son and the Son shares that mission and ministry with the disciples. The disciples, under the authority of the Father and the Son, strengthened and guided by the Spirit, take that

Kingdom living into the whole of creation. That is our Church. That is our vocation. That is how we need to understand ourselves as Christians.

Conclusion:

The best way of understanding the feast of Trinity Sunday is to see it as a feast of the activities of God. Our God is no distant God, locked away on some kind of heavenly throne. He is a God of action, a God who engages in history and in the lives of his people. He is a God who exercises his authority through men and women who are called and empowered by him. This was the case with the people of Israel and with the prophet Isaiah. They were called so that God could carry out his plans for creation. That is the only reason for them being “special”.

The Gospel of Matthew has the same message. God sent his Son into the world and the Son commissions men and women of faith to continue that divine work. What is needed is nothing more than faith and a willingness to live under the authority of God. It is not about the greatness of the one’s chosen but the greatness of the one choosing.

And so we are reminded that we are God’s instruments in the world. We are a sent people whose existence is only defined in terms of what we do. We are defined in terms of engaging the world in which we live with the Gospel, through what we say, how we live and by what we do. We cannot all be preachers and teachers but we can all point the world to the Kingdom of God by the way we live. Nothing less is expected of us. Let us pray on this feast that we continue to be a people of repentance, a people always looking for what God is calling us to be doing in the world in which we find ourselves living. And, most of all, let us pray that we can ensure that we do the will of God in all things and not be overwhelmed by the human and the political.