

## **Are you the one to come or are we to wait for another?**

Many Jews would have had an ideal of what the Messiah was going to be like for them! Some will have wanted a Messiah who would rid them of the occupying forces, or someone who would become the champion for their favourite cause, perhaps a good shepherd type Messiah, who would feed and look after them and not demand anything from them. Perhaps even the meek and mild Jesus we sing about in our carols and hymns, who wouldn't have challenged anything including the status quo! What would you have expected?

Let me take you back to Israel in the time of Isaiah. All the trappings of a prosperous nation, were available to the people. The economy was booming. The nation was not at war at this time, and was spending a massive amount of its money on defence to ensure that it stayed that way. In the temples and synagogues the people would have no problem giving thanks to God for all the things he had given them; because, as they saw it, he'd given them lots.

But Isaiah saw things differently.

Isaiah saw that the wealth of the rich people in the nation was made at the expense of the poor. He saw that those who ran businesses cheated their competitors and customers to make sure that their profits got bigger and bigger. Isaiah saw that in Israel at the time some people's greed led to other people's hunger. He saw that the gap between the poor and the rich was growing ever bigger.

Isaiah tried to listen to what the so-called holy men were saying about this, but he heard nothing because they, like everyone else in any position of power or authority, were part of the system. If they spoke out about the holiness of God, or God's demands on his people to live justly, these so-called holy men would have risked their comfortable positions in society. So they kept quiet.

Isaiah saw things differently. He saw weakness, a lack of confidence in the land, fear, blindness and deafness in the land, a hidden people, trapped in their homes through apathy and poverty. Isaiah realised that many of the people had no voice, because they couldn't fight against the business practices in those days, the political wranglings, or the whimpering of the priests, Isaiah realised that the people's voices couldn't be heard

Isaiah saw things differently. Isaiah knew God, because he had waited on God. He knew God's priorities, because he had listened to God. He knew where God's heart lay because he had experienced God.

Isaiah knew that God was listening to the heart-cries of the people suffering in this land. And so, rather than cry in despair - as some prophets and psalmists had done - Isaiah turned his eyes to the desert and looked for God's way.

Isaiah believed that God could make things new.  
*The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad,  
And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;  
It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice,  
Even with joy and singing.*

John the Baptist believed in new things too. .

Inspired by the words of Isaiah, John gave people the chance to start again, to see a new world approaching:

*A voice crying in the wilderness,  
'Prepare the way for the Lord;  
clear a straight path for him.'*

Are you the one to come or are we to wait for another? Jesus responded to this but then went on to ask what people had expected to see when they went to see John - A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup>What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. <sup>9</sup>What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This was no ordinary prophet, but the person who was going to prepare the way for Jesus.

Jesus came to change the world forever but what are we doing to keep that change, in terms of what He has commanded us to do? Do we look around and see where people are oppressed, hurting, blind, lame & dead spiritually and speak God's word of love and joy into their lives, can we and dare we even do that into our own lives?

*Mother Teresa* looked at the endless slums of Calcutta and looked for what might be God's way

*A French Roman Catholic, Jean Vanier*, looked at those in our societies who are emotionally and mentally handicapped. He founded a community called L'Arche, he looked for God's way.

*We can be people of God's way if we choose to be!*

**God's way...**

where the people of Afghanistan will live together in peace;

Where rich people of the world will share their wealth with people who have nothing;

Where the oppressed people of the world will be left alone by their oppressors;

Where our prejudices take a back seat because we follow Christ.

**God's way...**

A church which is full of colour and life;

A church which isn't obsessed with itself and money but looks out to the people around it, engages with them and meets their needs;

A church where status is of no concern to anyone, rather everyone is treated as if they were the only person who matters;

A church where caring and sharing are not just good ideas but the only way to live.

**What is God's way?** A way that confounds expectations, a way that turns everyday ways of thinking and understanding on its head – the lame shall leap, the blind shall see? YES! John the Baptist was the person who prepared the way for God to do a new work through Jesus....I like to think of him as someone who was passionate about his calling, what is our passion and calling? Are we carrying that work on or have we become too cosy, too insulated against injustice and oppression?

I want to finish with a vision of a city, written initially by a someone about his home town Glasgow, then adapted to talk of Liverpool and now I hope, an image of Chester in the spirit of Isaiah, in the spirit of John:

CHESTER HOPE (Adapted from 'The Prophet's Speech',  
in 'Words From The Late Late Service', Glasgow 1993)

I saw a vision:

it was last Thursday at eleven o'clock in the morning.

I was standing at the top of the Cathedral tower, looking down over the city  
and the cold, blue winter sky broke open over my head  
and the Spirit of God breathed on my eyes and my eyes were opened:

I saw Chester, the holy city, coming down out of heaven  
shining like a rare jewel, sparkling like clear water in the eye of the sun  
and all the sickness was gone from the city  
and there were no more suburbs and estates  
no difference between Boughton and Blacon  
I saw the Dee running with the water of life,  
as bright as crystal,  
as clear as glass  
the children of Chester swimming in it

And the Spirit showed me the tree of life  
growing in Grosvenor Park

I looked out and there were no more homeless people  
there were no people selling the Big Issue  
there were no more junkies up the closes  
HIV and AIDS were things of the past  
there were no more racist attacks  
no more attacks on gay people

no more prejudice against young or old,  
male or female, black or white or any colour in between  
no more rapists, no more stabbings  
no more Protestants and Catholics  
because there was no more hate  
and I saw women walking safe at nights  
and the men were full of passion and gentleness  
and none of the children were ever abused  
because the people's sex was full of justice and joy.

I saw an old woman throw back her head  
and laugh like a young girl  
and when the sky closed back her laughter rang in my head  
for days and days  
and would not go away.  
This is what I saw, looking across to the old County Hall,  
looking up from the city of death  
and I knew then that there would be a day of resurrection  
and I believe that there will be a day of resurrection. Do you?

Amen.

Dot Gosling 12.12.10