

The Second Sunday of Epiphany (Church of England)

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Roman Catholic)

Roman Catholic passages are in italics

Year A

Green

First Reading Isaiah 49.1-7

The Servant of the LORD

1 Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name.

2 He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.

3 He said to me, *You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendour.*

4 But I said, I have laboured to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due to me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God.

5 And now the LORD says— *he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honoured in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength—*

6 he says: *It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*

7 This is what the LORD says— the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel— to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.

What's going on?

This passage tells us more about God's servant. God intends to send his servant to the world and this has been God's plan for all time. The servant is called and given form by God from his conception and given a purpose and a ministry. This makes sense if we think about Jesus for Jesus is God in eternity and the angel of the Lord tells Mary of Jesus' being and purpose before he is conceived in her. Isaiah also says that the servant of God will be called to the people of Israel to turn their hearts and minds back towards God, but that his purpose will be larger than that, his example will reach out to people beyond Israel so that everyone will have the chance to know God.

Psalm 40 (RC 39).

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.

1 I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry.

2 He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.

3 He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.

4 Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods.

5 Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no-one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare.

6 Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.

7 Then I said, Here I am, I have come— it is written about me in the scroll.

8 I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.

9 I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O LORD.

10 I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly.

11 Do not withhold your mercy from me, O LORD; may your love and your truth always protect me.

12 For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me.

What's going on?

This is a song of trust and praise in God. It is particularly appropriate when we think about what it meant for Jesus to be the servant of God. Like the psalmist, here, he had to carry God's law in his heart and be obedient to his Father's will. In accepting this role of servant, he too had to speak about God to all around him and trust in God's love and protection in difficult times. With service and obedience comes proclamation and praise.

New Testament reading 1 Corinthians 1.1-9

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ— their Lord and ours:

3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.

5 For in him you have been enriched in every way— in all your speaking and in all your knowledge—

6 because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.

7 Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

8 He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

What's going on?

St Paul is writing to his friends in Corinth about a hope that Jesus will be revealed in glory at the end of time. For him, this was something that he felt could be very near, and reminds us to think about how Jesus was revealed to be God's servant, and, as we shall hear in the Gospel, the Lamb of God. Christians need to be spiritually prepared to know and understand God's revelation in Jesus and this preparation leads to being filled with God's grace and with God's gifts. Such preparation keeps the community strong and faithful, and that is how we are called to be as Christians today.

Gospel John 1.29-42 Jesus the Lamb of God

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

30 This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'

31 I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.

32 Then John gave this testimony: I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.

33 I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.'

34 I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.

35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples.

36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, Look, the Lamb of God!

37 When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.

38 Turning round, Jesus saw them following and asked, What do you want? They said, Rabbi (which means Teacher), where are you staying?

39 Come, he replied, and you will see. So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.

40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus.

41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, We have found the Messiah (that is, the Christ).

42 And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas (which, when translated, is Peter).

What's going on?

Last week we heard about the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. This week we hear from the Gospel of John about how John the Baptist felt about the experience. John testifies that he saw the revelation of God when he baptised Jesus and this confirms Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, God's own Son. So John speaks to others about Jesus, calling him the Lamb of God whose purpose is to free people from their sin and make it possible for them to be reunited with God. John focuses the attention of others on Jesus by pointing him out and so Jesus attracts followers, who in their turn tell others about Jesus. This is the beginning of evangelism and shows the disciples forging a relationship with Jesus as he gives Simon the name by which we know him best: Peter.

Why these passages?

As we move towards Lent, we learn more about God's particular revelation of the divine self in Jesus. So Jesus is the true servant of God, the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the Christ. What do these titles mean? They tell us that, as evidenced at Jesus' baptism, that Jesus is God's Son, and that as a human being he is chosen to do God's will and carry out God's plan. He accepts the task laid on him which confirms him as God's servant and also his purpose in taking away human sin and reconciling human beings with the Creator God. At the same time he has a specific role as the person whom the Jews expected to be their leader and King (although not in the way they expected) and to bring a message of God's love not only to his own people, the Jews, but to all people everywhere. We see him at the beginning of his ministry, and with his first disciples who believe in him and begin to spread the word about him.