

**3rd Sunday of Epiphany (Church of England)
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Roman Catholic)
Year A
Green**

First Reading Isaiah 9.1-4

The Righteous Reign of the Coming King

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

**The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.**

What's going on?

Isaiah is talking about the Messiah, the coming King. What will it be like when the chosen one of God comes to his people? It will be like light coming into the darkness. People who were afraid or living in misery will be joyful and will celebrate. The burdens beneath which people have to live will be lifted and they will be free. These lines therefore shape for us a picture of Jesus. His coming is as the light of the world, bringing people out of darkness into the light. His purpose is to release people from fear and doubt and to free people from whatever has been weighing them down. Isaiah was talking about contemporary events in his own time, but his prophetic words also help us to understand the coming of Jesus and what God sent him to do. The promise is still real and Christians worship in the

understanding that this liberation and freedom from fear and difficulty is what God wants for all of us today.

Psalm 27 (26 RC)

**¹The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?**

**⁴One thing I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to inquire in his temple.**

**⁵For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.**

**⁶Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.**

**⁷Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!**

**⁸'Come,' my heart says, 'seek his face!'
Your face, LORD, do I seek.**

⁹ Do not hide your face from me.

**Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.**

**Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!**

**¹⁰If my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will take me up.**

¹¹Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.

¹²Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.

What's going on?

This psalm continues the theme expressed in Isaiah. The coming of God into the world is as light and help and so we no longer need to be afraid of anything because God will help us. The psalmist is filled with joy at the thought of God's nearness, help and salvation, even in the midst of enemies. In his joy he seeks a closer relationship with God and trusts him to protect him from trouble. This then should also be the Christian response to the promises offered in Isaiah: love and trust in Jesus as God's son.

New Testament reading 1 Corinthians 1.10-18

Divisions in the Church

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, 'I belong to Paul', or 'I belong to Apollos', or 'I belong to Cephas', or 'I belong to Christ.' Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

Christ the Power and Wisdom of God

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

What's going on?

St Paul is worried about his friends in Corinth who are quarrelling about who is the best Christian leader and whom they should follow. Paul tells them that they should be united because dividing into different 'camps' distracts from what Jesus did. He argues that human beings should not stand in the way of people responding clearly to Jesus' death and resurrection, otherwise the message will get lost and Christians will forget to see the power of God.

Gospel Matthew 4.12-23

Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,

**on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
the people who sat in darkness**

**have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
light has dawned.'**

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Jesus Ministers to Crowds of People

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

What's going on?

Matthew is always keen to show how Jesus fulfilled the prophetic words in the Hebrew scriptures (the Old Testament) so here he calls upon the passage of Isaiah we heard earlier to show how it relates to Jesus and his ministry. Here is Jesus beginning his ministry in a specific place and time and Matthew wants to remind us that this is the very land that Isaiah spoke of. The beginning of Jesus ministry is marked by a calling to the first disciples, fishermen going about their work. In response to his call, the disciples stop what they are doing, leave everything and follow him. Then Jesus begins work: telling everyone about God, teaching people from the scriptures and healing people.

Why these passages?

We learn more about the prophetic picture of Jesus as the Messiah: a beacon of hope, a light in darkness, a protector and healer. If we believe in him we can be glad and not worry any more. But it is important to be focused and not get hung up on ideas of greatness, because Jesus is a servant of God who will die for us. Alongside these ideas we see what Jesus actually did when he was alive. Accepting his ministry he begins to go to work, calling his disciples to go with him and focusing people's minds on God. These passages are chosen to engage our minds and hearts too. Jesus calls us to be his disciples. What does being a disciple mean? Seeing Jesus at work, entering into his life and mind, we begin to understand what it was he did in his own time and what commission he laid on all who follow him. This is a further journey that we must make week by week, to Easter.