

THOUGHTS FOR HOLY WEEK

In my last post I spent some time with the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and today my starting point is another Old Testament Prophet, who is rather prominent in the Lectionary for Holy Week, Isaiah. Over the years I have grown to love the writings of the Prophets, in a way I think my harassed RE teacher at school would have found surprising. She seemed to major on the Prophets, so much that we nicknamed her Amos. Maybe I should have taken more notice of her.

But to this week's Lectionary readings, which are referred to as the Servant Songs. They are taken by many Christians to refer to the sufferings of Jesus, and whether this is so, or they simply fit remarkably well there is much to be gained from a look at them during Holy Week.

If you are familiar with Handel's Messiah, doubtless you will recognise some of the passages. Perhaps you could listen to the whole Oratorio or at least the aria "He was despised", or the choruses of "Surely he has borne our griefs" or "All we like sheep have gone astray". Of course Handel's words are taken from the Authorised Version of the Bible, but whatever translation you read, the words will be familiar.

These Servant Songs can be found in Isaiah Chapters 42: 1- 9, 49: 1- 7, 50: 4- 9a and the most extensive passage is at Chapter 52: 13 through Chapter 53 and it is this one, solemnly read on Good Friday which I want to look at briefly. It speaks of the chosen servant, who "was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity....." It paints a picture of pain and suffering, or a perversion of justice...yet there was no deceit in his mouth, nor did he practice violence. Elsewhere the Songs mention him being flogged, bruised and mocked and laid in the tomb "with the rich". This servant is faithful and does not resist evil and suffers in extreme as a result.

But Isaiah makes it clear this is not the end of the story, and it is easy to see why Christians have seen this as a reference to the Resurrection, which is of course for another day.

May I suggest that you take some time to read and ponder these Songs, hard and painful as they may be. They speak of God's infinite love and concern for his world, and of the extreme to which he went to heal our hurting and broken world. Together we can begin to see hope for the world and in particular for us in these troubled times.

And now a Prayer for Passiontide:-

Thanks be to thee, O Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits which thou hast given us;
for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for us.
O most merciful Redeemer, friend and brother,
may we know thee more clearly,
love thee more dearly,
and follow thee more nearly; day by day.
Amen

In Christ's love

Alice