

Advent 3, 2018

Rev David Fotheringham
High Street Uniting Church, Frankston

Isaiah 42: 1-9

Leadership.

This week, in the UK, Prime Minister Theresa May survived a no confidence vote, as the country heads towards what some consider to be 'freedom', and what some consider to be 'exile'. The population there is divided as the whole question of 'what sort of Brexit' will we have moves towards its conclusion. I'm persuaded by the commentary that suggests that when they voted for Brexit, most of the population were thinking about immigration, and not about trade, and now they're discovering that trade is the bigger issue and opinion is hugely divided as to how to approach it. What kind of leadership is required to bring the population safely through? Theresa May has some significant qualities – can they be enough to achieve a reasonable result?

When we come to Isaiah 42, we are looking at writing from the time of the exile, when the people of the Southern Kingdom of Israel, also known as Judah, and in particular the people of Jerusalem had been overwhelmed by the Babylonians and taken into exile in Babylon, where, by the rivers, they wept. But they also held on to hope for a return. Some of them started to settle in, and bring blessing to the new place they found themselves. But still there was mourning and yearning. How would they get back? How should they get back? Would Cyrus, the new King of Persia which was rising in power relative to Babylon, be used by God to bring about the restoration of Jerusalem? What would that look like? What kind of leader would God work through, and what kind of leadership would God's restored people display?

In that time, Isaiah was given prophetic words about what a future leader would look like, and their purpose. You may be able to recognise in it a depiction of Jesus. You may also want to consider how it compares both with leadership that we see in parts of the world, and with the leadership that the church, locally and broadly, offers to the world.

The second half of the passage we read from Isaiah focuses on emphasising that it is God who calls the servant (or servants), and that it is about restoring those who are exiled and imprisoned and bringing light to the nations so that they may truly see true living. But true living is caught more than taught, and the character of the one serving God this way is really important. That's why it's treated first, in the passage.

I reckon that there are about 5 words to describe the key characteristics mentioned in this passage. Some of our leaders display some of these characteristics, some of the time. I

invite you to think about how Jesus displayed them, and what these characteristics mean for you.

The first word is servant.

“Here is my servant, in whom I delight”.

- Jesus said to his disciples: “I am among you as one who serves...”
- servant of God, primarily
- neither a doormat nor a dictator
(art of leadership is about navigating balance,
helping people through hard choices at times)
- servant of God avoids both

The second word is Spirit.

“I have put my Spirit upon him”

- Could think in terms of fruit/gifts of Spirit,
but I think in terms of relationship.
- The Trinity: Lover, loved, loving; Spirit of relationship.
- person knows the peace/love of God
(even through hard times)

The third word is Justice.

“He will bring forth justice to the nations”

- procedural – victims restored, oppressors diverted;
- distributive – resources being shared well
- central calling here

Fourth word is “Gentleness”

“He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench...”

- protecting the weak; hands cupped around the wick...
- not bringing justice about by force
- perhaps not your regular political leadership!
- It may be thought that some personality types not naturally gentle; but certainly

I’ve experienced..

- grace / care / compassion

Fifth word: endurance

“he will faithfully bring forth justice;
he will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth...”

- gentleness is not weakness; it is strength here
- enduring and persisting

because God is in it, but gentle approach means persistence is required.

Servant, spirit, justice, gentleness, endurance.

This is a lot about character.

Does God care whether the UK exits the EU? Well, yes, though I doubt in the sense of there being a right or wrong thing to do – though there are certainly better and worse options. But in the midst of it, and in the midst of our community, Isaiah suggests a real interest in justice, and in the character of those who work for it.

Servant, spirit, justice, gentleness, endurance.

Which of those words catches your thoughts at the moment? If God was asking you to contemplate one of those words, which would it be?

What is God saying to you about it? Take a few minutes to reflect, on one of those words...

... If you can, shape a silent prayer to God
about what that word means to you this morning...