Sermon 4 before Lent,

70th Anniversary of Accession of Her Majesty,

6 Feb 22 by The Rev’d Graham Phillips

Isaiah 6.1-8

1 Corinthians 15.1-11

Luke 5.1–11

Here are moving in our liturgy from the wonders and joy of Christmas and the revealing of Christ to the world, to the cross, making the journey towards Lent and the start of a penitential season of self examination and  preparation for the extraordinary cataclysmic events of Easter, Christ’s death and resurrection. But we are not there yet. We are in the pre-journey stage, the warm up, the planning, the selection of what to take, how to travel. So it is appropriate that we glimpse what others have done on that journey, hear of their experience and allow that to prepare us.

Three men, three stories, with similar encounters, similar reactions, similar outcomes, the first one 600 plus years before the other two.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord.

The prophet Isaiah lived in Jerusalem some 600 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. God called him to speak his word to the southern kingdom of Judah at a time when they were threatened by the mighty nation of Assyria to their north who had already subdued and taken into captivity their brothers in the northern kingdom of Israel. Judah - a nation who had forgotten what it was to be God’s chosen people, selected to represent God before the whole world. Judah - a nation under threat from a powerful human king, and yet held in the palm of God’s hands.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord.

Isaiah was called by God to speak to this disobedient nation and encourage them back into trusting God. And the passage we heard is Isaiah’s description of his call.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

Isaiah sees the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty, well above him, and the hem of his robe fills the temple. He does not see God’s face for no one can see God and live.  He knows that this is a vision of God. And there are heavenly creatures, Seraphs, serving God, extraordinary creatures with six wings and one calls out to another: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

This declaration of the Holiness of God causes the very structure of the temple to shake and it is filled with smoke. And Isaiah is afraid. “Woe is me! I am lost, undone, ruined, dead - for I am a man of unclean lips, every word I’ve ever spoken is tainted— blasphemous even! My personal sins of speech are enough to condemn me. And in addition to this I live among a people of unclean lips, everyone I know talks in the same unclean way, using words that corrupt and desecrate. Yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord, the Jehovah of hosts.”

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The *whole earth* is full of his glory…. But not me. I am not holy.

When the voice of God spoke to Moses from the burning bush Moses was commanded to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. Later in life, Moses twice spent 40 days in solitude with God, and his face shone from the brilliance of God’s presence, but he was told that he could not see God face to face otherwise he would die. He could only see God’s back. Elijah heard the voice of God not in the wind, earthquake, or fire but in a period of sheer silence. He covered his face to make sure he would not see God. Ezekiel saw visions of four heavenly creatures with wings and different heads and intersecting wheels turning within wheels moving as one. Visions that left him overwhelmed for 7 days. Jeremiah and Daniel also saw heavenly visions that troubled and disturbed them.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The *whole earth* is full of his glory….But not me. I am not holy.

Simon Peter after he had heard Jesus preach from his boat and then had caught a miraculous catch of fish following Jesus’s command, fell at Jesus’s knees and begged him, implored him, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.”  Paul who wrote the letter to the church in Corinth considered himself the least of the apostles and unfit to be called an apostle because he had persecuted the followers of Jesus.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The *whole earth* is full of his glory….But not me. I am not holy.

This is the cry of everyone who meets with God, who meets with the living Lord Jesus….Is it our cry? God is God. We forget the awesomeness of God, the holiness of God at our peril. The writer to the Hebrews wrote “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Heb 10.31.)

So my friends does this make you feel pretty wretched? Pretty low? Then take heart. Our three heroes were all sanctified and redeemed by God and then put to work doing what God had called them to do. Isaiah faithfully preached God’s word to the nation God had chosen and loved. Peter became the rock on which Christ’s church, the community of believers was built and Paul formed many new communities of believers across the Mediterranean and left us a legacy of inspiring, provoking, insightful letters which help our understanding of God.

Each of the others I named similarly were redeemed and equipped by God to do his will, all through the grace of God. And her Majesty the Queen is a shining example of someone who for the last 70 years has faithfully kept to the promises she made on her 21st birthday and also at her coronation, serving this nation with the help of God.

So what about you and me? We likewise have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. Just as he said to Peter, Jesus says to us: “Do not be afraid” and then gives us his commands, his desires for each of us, his calling, his vocation for each of us. This could be to be a faithful husband or wife, a loving parent or friend, someone who looks out for neighbours, for family, who listens empathetically, and offers an encouraging word.

It could be task orientated - yes, we need a new treasurer and a new secretary here in Hanwood church - could that be you? Is God calling you? Beckoning you? It could be baking cakes for Messy Church, cleaning the brasses, being on the flower rota, calling on someone in need, being God’s light to neighbours, friends - these are all Kingdom actions, furthering the Kingdom of God in a multitude of ways. Each of us is unique and God calls us to an unique role, that no one else is called to do at this moment, in this place, at this time. It is up to us. If we do not do it, then it will remain undone, a vacancy in the Kingdom of God, a gap in God’s magnanimous plan.

So my brothers and sisters in Christ. Allow the Holy Spirit to inspire you, to lead you into God’s purposes for you. To recognise that God is awesome. That we are not worthy to come into his presence and yet, God by his grace, in his great love for us, forgives us, wipes away our iniquities, washes us clean and extends his holiness to us so that we can stand before him and with the seraphs cry:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory…including you and me. Amen.

Rev’d Graham Phillips

Blessings

Graham Phillips
The Revd Graham D Phillips, Rector of Great Hanwood, Longden and
Annscroft with Pulverbatch
The Rectory, Plealey Lane, Longden, Shrewsbury, SY5 8ET, 01743 861003