

**Lent 4 WW Evensong**  
**18 March 2007**

**Isaiah 40:27-41:13.**

**2 Timothy 4:1-18.** Be watchful, endure, teach, preach, admonish. Trust in the Lord.

**Psalm 30.** Exaltabo te domine. Of sustenance. You lift me up. Healed me. Sustained me.

**Patrick** (yesterday). Could have given up, but didn't.

**Sustenance**

- Half way through lent.
- Tired as it happens, in need of refreshment.
- Today we remember the church as the centre of our lives, the place for refreshment, refreshment Sunday, cheering up Sunday, be happy Sunday, gouranga Sunday.

And it seems the readings think we need cheering up. There's a sense of weariness in them. Isaiah is talking to the weary, to those that are heavy laden and need rest, and Paul is weary in his letter to Timothy, ready to shuffle off this mortal coil.

But the readings are also about sustenance. And one of the reasons we come to church is for refreshment, refuelling. A vision of heaven on earth, as in the orthodox tradition. And tonight's readings do indeed comfort us. This liturgy comforts us, the sameness of it week by week allowing us to participate almost automatically as our minds are free to roam.

The psalm was a psalm of sustenance. The first Lesson one that tells us that come what may, God is there for us. We need a spiritual protector on our side, and we have one. *Great is thy faithfulness*. This is Isaiah, the servant. There's nothing servile about this servanthood. This servant indulges in some fairly robust discussions. The servant is powerful and active. This servanthood is not slavery. A servant furnishes, supplies, conveys messages. Servants are very influential. Those who serve us are often the people we talk to. They hear a lot, they give gentle advice, and their comments can influence us greatly. How many of you have heard of Jeeves and Wooster? Bertie Wooster might well have been the employer and Jeeves the servant, but there is no doubting who had the influence.

**So we are being ministered to.**

- We are suffering – allowing it to happen.
- We are passive – this is a kind of passion.
- **Intourist holiday.**

When I'm empty I just acknowledge it and let myself be refilled from within. I am not always in control and neither should I expect to be. And at this stage of lent, perhaps we can learn something from this passivity. We need not always be doing, seeking, being active all the time. But perhaps sitting back and reflecting.

**We need a good teacher.** As Paul tells Timothy, without a teacher, we can't sift the need to know from the nice to know. The need to know from the need not know. Left to our own desires, our itching ears and insatiable appetite for variety of experience will be seduced by popular teachers who peddle insubstantial trash and fables. We will hear what we want to hear – something to scratch our **itching ears**. But if we hear God's word, God does something wonderful in us. Left to ourselves, we would rather do it our way, but God changes our heart in wonderful ways, giving us a desire for His word.

**Jesus is a good teacher.** Arab saying: He who teaches me becomes my master and I their slave. We are, as Paul says, slaves to Christ.

I realised something only last week about Jesus' desert experiences. He was tempted to act. He refused to act. It's about not showing off. Jesus could have showed off by falling for the devil's temptations, but he didn't. And I wonder what we make of the devil? An external force, or perhaps an internal one. Perhaps the urge to show off, to glitter. I feel I am rather susceptible to that urge – it was bred into me as one of the ways to get approval. But think how many awkward situations have arisen because of a need to show off, to flex muscles, for self-aggrandisement. But it takes such a lot of energy. And at this stage in Lent there isn't much energy. Our tiredness and weariness (Isaiah 40:29) comes from a lack of inherent strength.

Where do we get the strength from? Let Jesus provide the strength. But it is possible that we can help him.

Remember last week's gospel. The fig tree was barren, but rather than have it cut down, its roots were restricted and manure was put on the soil. I see the root restriction as separation, withdrawal, time for

reflection. And the manure? (How lovely to be able to talk in church about manure). Manure as fertilizer. Manure is the product of digestion, the residue of what we take in. Manure is a fertilizer. The baobab tree needs Elephant dung for germination. Rowan berries need to go through the gut of a bird to help them germinate. In psychological terms, you might say manure in this story can represent the residue of our experiences, good and bad.

Perhaps we should take the time to use the residue, the lessons, of our experiences and learn from them, allowing them to fertilize growth within us. We might, in the words of the BCP, mark, learn and inwardly digest our experiences. By so doing, we start to get to know ourselves. We start to discard images from the past, the expectations of others and the exposure of childhood hurts to the cold light of day so that they can then wither away. And however far down I go, it always seems that I have never reached the bottom of the barrel. There is always more. I need to become spiritually naked, unclothed, to see. No clothes, no barriers.

This self-examination

- might give us access to deepest needs and deepest desires, reaching those parts of our souls that nothing else can reach.
- can enable us to cleanse the temples full of rubbish inside us.
- can allow us access to the secret garden within, pulling aside the ivy covered door, so that we can reach the divine core, allowing the divine seed within us to germinate.

This last bit is important. As you'll already have gathered, I have only one message really, and it's that within us all is a divine core. It's the point of the Incarnation and Pentecost, to divinize human life. It's a frequent theme in Holy Scripture that we begin to get glimpses of God when we truly know ourselves. And this is the theme of much psychology too: know yourself, and you begin to get glimpses of the divine within. God became man not to pay debts, but to sanctify humanity, unify human and divine.

- Paul: It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.
- Irenaeus: God became human so that humans might become God.
- 3rd century writer: Harrowing of hell, Jesus and Adam. Adam arise and come forth. Henceforth you and I are one undivided person.

In these last three weeks of Lent, imagine Jesus saying this to you, and seeing what happens. Let Jesus take over your soul, your impulses.

Jesus comes from without. He comes to meet us, he is always ready to knock on the door. Jesus comes from within. He is there within and always ready to hear us when we knock on that of our inner temple.

**Last week I rambled about exploring God. Today I'm rambling about God exploring in us. Let God explore inside us and take over.**

So perhaps, just sit back and let the inner and eternal me do the talking and walking and deciding. The inner and eternal me that is most obviously seen in childhood before the grime of the world has corrupted it and scarred it. The inner light that was the example for Patrick. Patrick had a hard time, he was persistent. He didn't bow down to the oppressor. Look at the Irish experience: underdog to major force;

Result

- Demolish the walls that separate us from each other
- And demolish the walls that separate inner from outer
- Walls of Jericho come tumbling down.

**Let us pray, after St Patrick.**

May the strength of God pilot us.

May the power of God preserve us.

May the wisdom of God instruct us.

May the hand of God protect us.

May the way of God direct us.

May the shield of God defend us.

May the host of god guard us against the snares of evil and temptations of the world.

May Christ be with us.

Christ above us.

Christ in us.

Christ before us.

May your salvation, O Lord, be always ours this day and for evermore, Amen.