

## Sermon for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany Year A (22 Jan 2023)

[Isaiah 9:1-4](#)

[1Corinthians 1: 10-18](#)

[Matthew 4: 12-23](#)

### Sermon

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock, and our Redeemer.

This is the Sunday of the week of prayer for Christian Unity, and here we have a selection of readings from the Revised Common Lectionary, itself a product of that unity. I have spoken in previous sermons of my concerns about the early church searching for and using texts for predictions of the Coming of Jesus, often in contexts their writers did not envisage. Prophets usually spoke into their own context, without being conscious of the future, and the ways in which their words would be read by later generations, so there is a question over the meaning of this reading from Isaiah, is it to be taken literally as a prediction of the Coming of Jesus or not, if not what then does it mean?

Zebulun, and Naphtali, mentioned in both the Old Testament and Gospel readings are actually sons of Jacob by his wife Leah and concubine Bihah. If that makes you think of Bihah as his ‘bit on the side’ his ‘other woman’ remember that the status of being a concubine was an ancient and complex one.

It’s not as simple as it seems.

Jacob’s sons must have both founded tribes in the northern part of what was then Israel. Remember the Lost Tribes I mentioned in an earlier sermon, some of them must have been lost to the Assyrian Empire when it took over the land and forcibly removed them.

Interestingly, the versions of Scripture quoted in the Gospels are not always identical to the versions we know in the Old Testament today. Perhaps the most notable example being what is often spoken of as ‘Jesus’ Manifesto’ where the quotation from Isaiah does not match modern translations. I have spoken before of the translators difficulties in deciding how to translate scripture.

Anyone who wants to break out into Handel’s Messiah on hearing these verses is hereby excused, because the words of scripture were used in that oratorio.

Psalm 27 the Psalm we don’t use at this season as it’s not a penitential season, was actually one of the Morning Prayer psalms for Friday and is set for today, so It could have been read more recently than you might be expecting. If you read it is a complex psalm, mainly one of supplication. Why is it used here, what is its relation to the other readings is questionable, it seems to concentrate on staying in the temple, but the

temple can be seen as a place of physical refuge as well as spiritual sanctuary, and what do we make of the desire to see God's face, a privilege which was denied even to Moses ? You may remember that mortals were not allowed to see the face of God and live!

In the reading from 1 Corinthians Paul seems to be getting forgetful as to who he has baptised. As I age, and my memory gets more fallible ,all I can say about it is "Amen" . There seems to have been a good deal of factionalism in the Corinthian Church about who baptised who to which Paul is opposed. And as for asking us all to agree about things of importance, we could have a good PCC meeting about that subject.

In our Gospel, where Jesus calls His Disciples, I've sometimes been moved to wonder how Simon and Andrew's families survived the loss of food providers and wage earners, how Joseph coped with the lack of someone with whom to share the heavy lifting and how Zebedee got on without James and John to help him with what could have been quite a physically demanding job, especially for what must have been a man of mature years. The Gospel tells us that he was their father.

The Syria mentioned in the Gospel is not the modern, and much fought over area we know today, which is something of an artificial country set up in the wake of World War 1 which was really "The European War" and only a world war because the nations involved called on their empires for support. It was followed by mandates for the victors. I think in this case it was the French who took over from the Ottoman Empire. It was in fact a rather different area of land at the time of these events, hence the reference to it in our Gospel reading. I think it was a province of the Roman Empire.

As for Jesus Ministering to Crowds of People, I find myself needing to ask 'where did they all come from' did they leave their day jobs? Jesus must have been kept very busy! What we make of the Miracle Cures must depend on how we view scripture. However you view it I hope I've given you something to pray, meditate or think about,

Amen