

Harnham Parish Churches
Sunday 18th April 2021



Readings: Isaiah 5 v 1-10
Luke 6 v 17- 26 The
Beatitudes

Caring for the poor and the vulnerable :
A reflection on the Old Testament Prophets of the Eighth-Century

One of the features of the religion of Israel in the Old Testament is its emphasis on caring for the poor and vulnerable. In this it is in sharp contrast with the other religions around them which seldom mention this.

In the Torah, the Law, the first five books of our Old Testament, there are frequent reference to providing for “the foreigner, the widow and the orphan”. These three groups were particularly vulnerable. The foreigner was usually a landless labourer who had had to leave his own country because of famine, and was now without any regular source of food or income, looking for work to earn something to buy food for himself and his family. The widow and the orphan were especially vulnerable in a patriarchal society because they had no man to provide for them and protect them.

The eighth century prophets of Israel and Judah frequently emphasised this theme. In Jerusalem Isaiah proclaimed

“Cease to do evil, learn to do good.
Seek justice, rescue the oppressed.
Defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” (chapter 1 vs 17)

Micah joins him in charging Judah’s rulers with bribery:

“The official and the judge ask for a bribe,
and the powerful dictate what they desire.
and so they pervert justice.” (chapter 7 vs 3)

In the north Amos composes a little satirical poem picturing the self-indulgent luxury of the rich.

“Alas to those who lie on beds of ivory,
And lounge on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock,
and calves from the stall;
who drink wine from bowls,
and anoint themselves with finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of (their people).” (chapter 6, vs 4, 6)

In the New Testament Jesus reaches out to those who are poor, on the margins of society. In the Beatitudes in Luke’s Gospel (chapter 6 vs 20) he declares

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.”

HYMN REFLECTION Malcolm Sturgess

It can be a bit difficult when it comes to choosing hymns to go with Old Testament readings, but Chris Idle's *Spirit of holiness, wisdom and faithfulness* seems to fit well with Jesus' quoting Isaiah 61 in Luke, Chapter 4, verse 18, even though it is more specifically based on John, Chapter 14, verse 26. It suggests the sequence of prophecy (Isaiah) - fulfilment (Jesus) - continuation through the Holy Spirit. I have Chris's own book, *Light upon the river*, which he sold me cheap to avoid carrying it home from Conference. In it he says he modelled the text to fit the folk tune *Blow the wind southerly*. He says that within twenty years of its first performance in May 1975 it had become one of his most requested texts. Apparently Michael Saward, of *Christ triumphant* fame, said it was too long, and some editors omit Chris's favourite verse, but we print the full text below (as does the New A & M).

Chris follows John Bell's example in choosing music from a folk song to enhance his hymn. *Blow the wind southerly* is an ideal choice. The Spirit of God, although unseen like the wind, is always with us. Indeed I think "spirit" and "wind" are the same in Hebrew? And the use of a well-known melody makes it easier to concentrate on new words.

***Spirit of holiness, wisdom and faithfulness,
Wind of the Lord, blowing strongly and free:
strength of our serving and joy of our worshipping -
Spirit of God, bring your fulness to me.***

**You came to interpret and teach us effectively
all that the Saviour has spoken and done;
to glorify Jesus is all your activity -
promise and gift of the Father and Son: *Spirit of holiness, etc.***

**You came with your gifts to supply all our poverty,
pouring your love on the church in her need;
you came with your fruit for our growth to maturity,
richly refreshing the souls that you feed: *Spirit of holiness, etc.***

**You came to the world in its pride and futility,
warning of dangers, directing us home;
now with us and in us, we welcome your company;
Spirit of Christ, in his name you have come: *Spirit of holiness, etc.***

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You may like to learn more about the 8th century prophets by watching these short 8 minute Youtube clips.

Isaiah 1- 39

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0A6Uchb1F8>

Isaiah 40- 66

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TzdEPuqqQg>

Amos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGgWaPGpGz4>

Hymns you may enjoy linked to the theme
God of the poor...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kVHKuldZyw>

Beauty for brokenness Graham Kendrick

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QI9h7B8L71U>

O Lord hear the cry of the poor by

John Michael Talbot

Revd Becky.

A prayer from Christian Aid

**Creator God,
you loved the world into life.
Forgive us when our dreams of the future
are shaped by anything other than
glimpses of a kingdom
of justice, peace and an end to poverty.**

**Incarnate God,
you taught us to speak out for what is
right.
Make us content with nothing less than a
world
that is transformed into the shape of love,
where poverty shall be no more.**

**Breath of God,
let there be abundant life.
Inspire us with the vision of poverty over,
and give us the faith, courage and will to
make it happen. Amen.**