

# GPP Reflection for 19 January 2020

**Readings:** Psalm 40 : 1 – 11 Call to Worship, John 1: 29 – 42  
(congregational story),

Isaiah 49: 1 – 7, 1 Corinthians 1: 1-9 **Hymn before Reflection:** CH4 606  
Lord, you sometimes

## **Reflection: CHOSEN, CALLED AND BLESSED**

- *Who is Israel in Isaiah? concentric answers: nation, remnant, individual*
- *Who are God's people? - belong, in union with Christ, message firmly established, trust God*
- *in partnership with God – koinonia – servants of the Servant*
- *what does it mean to you to be called to be God's holy people?*

God speaks today – that is what we have just affirmed in that song. God did not stop speaking when the books of the Old and New Testament were written or when they were grouped together. God still speaks - sometimes in amazing and surprising ways. We need to be aware and listening at all times – the voice of God may come to us through a friend or stranger, a situation, an event, something we read or see, a moment of deep meditation or reflection, or a moment of questioning and doubt, or maybe in an aha moment as we have thought about recently – when something is suddenly revealed or becomes clear. The light of God dawns on us and in us and through us.

All our Bible readings today have confirmed that we are chosen, called, blessed and strengthened by God, and that God gives us tasks to do in life, including sharing the news of God's blessing with others, and sometimes of being rather than doing.

Psalm 40 reminds us that those who trust in God are blessed and need to tell others about that blessing. Here is a paraphrase of that psalm that may resonate with you: James Taylor: Psalm 40

1. *I believed I could make it on my own – but I slipped and fell. I sank into a morass of my own making.*
2. *The Holiness of Being heard my cry, lifted me out of the mire and set me on solid ground.*
3. *Like any addict who quits, I must talk about what has happened to me. Like a bird at dawn, I must sing praises to the skies. I will risk being a bore; if just one person hears me, my work has not been wasted.*
4. *Too many today chase false gods; they try to multiply their own gains.*
5. *But the richest returns come from God. You can't begin to count your blessings!*
6. *God does not want us to wear frowns or long faces; God wants us to find childlike joy in shining*

*drops of dew, in whispering pine needles, in warm sand between the toes.*  
7,8. *Our delight becomes one with God's; our personalities blend.*

9. *So I will not keep silent; I will proclaim my good news privately and publicly.*

10. *I cannot keep it to myself.*

I wonder whether

that is your reaction too?

In Isaiah 49 the Holy God of Israel speaks through the prophet Isaiah about the people being chosen to serve God and given strength to do that. Let's delve a little deeper into what this means.

The Book of Isaiah has three distinct sections, written at different times. The first section from chapter 1 to 39, was written at the time when Judah was threatened by its powerful neighbour, Assyria, but also more significantly threatened by the way in which the people had turned away from God. The second part of Isaiah, chapters 40 to 55, includes chapter 49 we heard this morning. At this time, the people of Judah were in exile in Babylon feeling crushed and without hope. The theme of this section though is that there is hope, that God would take the people back to Jerusalem, and many nations would be blessed through Israel. Light would come to the nations through them. The third part of Isaiah is mostly addressed to the people when they were back in Jerusalem. It called for them to live justly and assured them God was faithful even if they weren't. All through Isaiah, however, there are three different ways in which the term Israel is to be understood. Sometimes it means the whole nation. Sometimes it means the remnant of the faithful who continued to worship and serve God when others turned away. Sometimes it was referring to an individual, like Isaiah the prophet. These three understandings are like concentric circles interwoven and interconnecting, each giving meaning to the others and forming a lasting pattern.

The nation, the faithful, and individuals like the prophets, were all God's people and all had a responsibility to live God's way. Sometimes it seemed like God had to rely on the remnant of faithful people or just one lone individual to ensure that God's message was proclaimed and lived.

In Isaiah 49, the proclamation is about the nation of Israel being chosen by God to be a light to the nations and yet most of the verses we heard read today talked about one person being the servant of the Lord. The whole people of Israel were to bring light to others but it would happen because of the faithfulness of individuals. It was much the same in Corinth.

Paul, the much travelled missionary, had established the church in Corinth. This was a large and significant Greek city, capital of a province of the Roman Empire. It was known for its thriving commerce, variety of peoples and religions - and for widespread immorality. When Paul heard of problems experienced in the church, he wrote to the Corinthian Christians to help them understand how God's good news related to the challenges they experienced in everyday life and faith. The letter as we have it now is made up of several messages Paul sent them. Of course the most well known part of this letter is

chapter 13 about love – that is like the culmination of Paul’s theme. Living God’s way means living a way of real love.

In chapter 1, verse 2, Paul makes it clear that God’s people in Corinth are called to be a holy people, worshipping God because they belong to God, just as all followers of Jesus are also to be God’s holy people - the equivalent of Israel the nation. In verse 4 Paul goes on to talk about this particular group in Corinth for whom he gives thanks to God because they have had wonderful grace poured out on them. In verses 5 to 7 Paul acknowledges that these Corinthian Christians have become firmly established in their faith and have received many blessings and gifts from God. Verses 8 and 9 affirm that God is faithful and will give them strength. They belong to the *koinonia*, the fellowship, and are in partnership with God; they are servants of the Servant. Isaiah’s message was also about being God’s servant.

So what is the message here for us today?

We too are called to be God’s holy people, in partnership with God – a wonderful privilege but also an awesome responsibility. God works through God’s holy people, the servants of the Servant Messiah, Jesus the Christ. God’s light is shed throughout the world through God’s people. How does that happen? It happens when we live what we know – as Psalm 40 encourages us to do - finding childlike joy in simple things, living in an attitude of praise and thanks, and trusting God for strength. It means sharing the good news in multiple ways. All Andrew did was take his brother to meet Jesus – and that brother, Simon, became Peter the rock, a follower of Jesus who often failed but persevered and grew in his faith and understanding. Peter had a profound influence on the early Christian movement, which might never have happened if Andrew had not taken him to meet Jesus.

The way you live and ordinary things you do influence others. A simple gesture like inviting someone to come with you to a service or to Open Door or a study group may have a profound effect on their life. Befriending someone who is lonely or sharing what you have with someone who needs it, may affect them deeply. If your way of living shows that you are always grateful to God for all the blessings in your life, that you trust God, and that your actions are motivated by your faith, you never know what effect that may have on someone else. God’s light spreads through you. As God’s light dawns on you, so it is shared with others. You are chosen, called and blessed – like the people of Israel, like the remnant of the faithful, like the prophets, like the Christians in Corinth. You are God’s holy people. I encourage you to continue thinking about what that means for you - but let me assure you that one of the significant meanings is that God is always with you. The beautiful presence of Christ is indeed a blessing for each of us – gentle yet strong. All of our living is grounded in grace. God lives within us as we live in God. God bless you. Amen.

*We sing as part of our response to God 'Beautiful Presence'*