

# Sermon

## 'Do you see what I see?'

Year C, 2022, Fifth Sunday after Epiphany



On Tuesday, in my role as Area Dean of Bayside, I attended a meeting with the Bishop, the Archdeacons, and the other Area Deans within the Jumbunna episcopate. Travelling by train, my journey to Bishop's Court in East Melbourne took me past St Patrick's Cathedral. The soaring spires of that Cathedral reminded me of my calling to the ministry. When, two decades ago, as a senior manager with Price Waterhouse Coopers, in the Corporate Finance and Investment Banking division, I found myself being called by God, to take up my vocation as a minister in his church. Through that strange, spiritual experience, I could relate to the vision of Isaiah in the temple, that was at the same time his calling. The Most High God has revealed himself, and it was for Isaiah to follow that call.

I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.' The pivots on the threshold shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!' Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.' Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!'

Yesterday I attended a service of ordination at St Paul's Cathedral. Listening to the testimony of those men and women whom God has called to serve as a minister in his church. In order that they may understand the depth, and breadth, and height, of that calling, during their preparation for ordination, they will have been asked to reflect on their calling from God, through the calling of the prophet Jeremiah, which we read last week:

'Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,' Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.' Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.' But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I

command you, Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.’ Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, ‘Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over the nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.’

The calling of men and women is a central part of God’s provision for his church. The church that is not simply an administrative structure or an evangelical program but the body of Christ. The body of Christ that is no mere figure of speech but the spiritual reality of the risen Christ himself. In whom the future kingdom of God, is already now present, here and now, in the midst of an unsuspecting and unbelieving world. As the future of the world, now dawned in Jesus Christ, the Messiah of God.

In 2004 Rowan Williams gave a lecture at Ripon College Cuddesdon, for their 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. He called it ‘The Christian Priest Today.’ There he called the church ‘the place or dimension in the universe that is growing towards being the universe itself in restored relationship with God.’ It is, he said, ‘a reality shaped by Jesus Christ, by Christ’s action, even here and now, daily – through his self-giving, made once for all on the cross, as the gift that makes peace between humanity and God.’ The climate or landscape of this dimension is that of the generous self-offering of Christ.. He gave himself fully, he gave his whole life, into the fulfilment of his ministry, and his mission. Love not stored up, but poured out. A love which the tradition has described as the priestly self-offering of Christ, the great high Priest.’ A life poured out, even unto death, in witness to the kingdom of God. Drawn near to the world, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has drawn near; repent and believe in the good news.’

The message of Jesus, this is our message. The message each one of us is called to proclaim, taking up the cross of their own particular vocation in the church, in witness to the Lordship of God, now come in Christ Jesus, and present today throughout the whole Christian church.

The Church is the place, the dimension of the universe that is growing towards being the universe itself, in restored relationship to God. And that is being shaped, every moment, every day, everywhere, by Christ through the Church. The church is a Mission. The place where the kingdom of God has dawned upon the world.

The future destiny of the world, is in the church. It is nowhere present in the world.

The future destiny of which John the seer saw:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”