

**Sunday 30 January 2022**  
**Holy Trinity – Holy Communion**  
**Epiphany 4**

Ezekiel 43:27-44:4

1 Corinthians 13

Luke 2:22-40

When I'm thinking about my sermon preparation I always try to give some thought as to why the readings have been chosen or how they perhaps hang together. Well, it's perhaps not immediately obvious today but, hopefully, we may get there by the time I've finished.

My first thought though was that the Ezekiel reading might have been chosen because it was a suitable fit with our Gospel account of Jesus' presentation in the temple. And I say that because both readings seem to talk about the proper fulfilment of the law in one way or another.

The passage from Ezekiel is part of a long tour that Ezekiel is taken on covering the rebuilding of the perfect temple. That's to say, the new temple in which true and acceptable worship will now be offered.

At the beginning of chapter 40, three chapters before today's passage, Ezekiel tells us that, by virtue of a series of visions, he was brought out of exile into the land of Israel and a man, "whose appearance shone like bronze" he says, conducts him on a tour of the temple, measuring as he goes.

Those measurements are then given to us in great detail.

I have to admit that I find it pretty much impossible to imagine what the finished product would have looked like from all that detail but, as the detail builds up piece by piece, I do get an overwhelming sense of just how important all this detail is.

How much it matters to get it all right.

In particular, what strikes me is the sense of intimacy and reverence, awe if you like, that is obvious from Ezekiel's account. The sheer practical detail of the measurements, the decorations, what must be washed, what must be offered and where.

For Ezekiel this was all of vital importance but, in a way, this is all completely mundane.

You could argue that it's just basically architects' and builders' plans, with some post-ordination training for priests thrown in.

And yet, and yet, as a result of all this attention to detail, we hear that God comes to this temple and fills it with his glory.

As I say that now, it all feels just a bit matter of fact, but just imagine what that might have been like.

Try to imagine what it might be like if it were to happen now here in this particular temple.  
Ezekiel's response is the only one possible - he falls to the floor face down.

You can see that same sense of reverence in our Gospel reading from Luke too. At 40 days old Jesus is taken to the temple for the traditional redemptive offering of the first born child and also for Mary's purification after childbirth - another account of proper fulfilment of the law.

So, here, we have just an ordinary family, doing the usual things after a child is born. There were probably other couples there doing exactly the same thing. Even the two, strange, old people could be part of the family picture. A bit like having the grandparents along, perhaps?  
But they, like Ezekiel, are witnessing the glory of the Lord coming to the temple.

Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord in what he clearly understands to be a vision. A vision he has longed for and given up much for.  
Anna and Simeon, too, have anticipated their moment for a long time too. I can imagine them as something of an odd couple, two elderly people always hanging around the temple precincts, seemingly forever on the lookout for something.  
Maybe they had their sandwiches together and shared news about their expectations and their ailments. Perhaps they prayed together.  
And then, one ordinary day, it happened.  
For Simeon and Anna there was a jolt of recognition, a flash of joy for them both.

Simeon had been promised that he would not die "before he had seen the Lord's Messiah".  
He couldn't have known precisely what that meant, but his long, patient time of obedient waiting on God meant that he was instantly able to see in the baby Jesus the Messiah he had been waiting for.  
We'll never know how he knew, he just did.

Anna, the aged Anna, who never left the temple but, we are told "worshipped there with fasting night and day", she also recognised the Christ, and immediately began to speak about him to anyone and everyone.

As we read all about this today, we have had the benefit all the fanfare of the angels, the shepherds and the wise men, as well as Luke's Gospel account. We would have to be stupid not to know who this child is going to be.  
But Anna and Simeon have had to be moulded and shaped into the truth the hard way.

It would be easy as well to think that Ezekiel, Anna and Simeon were the way they were as a result of sheer gift from God.

But, to do that would be to forget the drivenness and the longing that had kept them constantly looking for the Lord.

They weren't concerned that people should see they were right after all; they only wanted, or rather, they were just desperate to see God glorified.

Then we have our passage from Paul's missive to the Corinthians.

Just before the chapter we heard today, we find Paul challenging the church at Corinth about spiritual gifts.

"Is that what you want above all else?" he asks them.

They have confused their newfound gifts with the glory. They have become so charmed, so beguiled with the things that they can now do, thanks to God, that they have lost track of God himself.

A trap we should all beware of, whether we've been Christians for just a few weeks or for many years.

Paul's description of love could easily be a description of Anna and Simeon but, more than that, it is above all things, a description of God.

And that is utterly extraordinary, especially if you think about it in the context of what our own approaches to God can sometimes be like.

If God does not insist on his own way, then we are hardly in a position to do so.

If Jesus bears all things and endures all things, then our impatient need for instant gratification looks very shallow indeed.

There's nothing flowery or romantic with this love that Paul is talking about.

No, it's more a mixture of the intimacy, reverence and awe that we have seen in all of our readings today.

As Christians we are called into a family, sharing homely, mundane, daily lives and yet, and this never ceases to amaze me, somehow those lives are completely absorbed into the life of our creator God.

So much so that, whether we are looking for it or not, we can see God's glory, day by day, in every aspect of our own lives.

Is that enough though?

The way it was more than enough for Anna and Simeon?

And, if it is, will we know it and, like Ezekiel, fall on our faces in response to the privilege we have been granted?

Or, will we be like those Corinthians, and just prefer the idea to the real thing?

Amen.