

17 December 2017

Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-11

John 1.6-8, 19-28

Anointed and appointed

“Know Thyself” was written on the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. Legend tells that the seven sages of ancient Greece, philosophers, statesmen and law-givers, who laid the foundation for western culture, gathered in Delphi to inscribe “know thyself” at the entry to its sacred oracle.

“The essence of knowledge is self-knowledge,” - the Greek philosopher Plato.

Centuries later, the Persian poet Rumi wondered, “Who am I in the midst of all this thought traffic?”

‘Know thyself’

It is great to find people who seem to be ‘comfortable in their skin’ – who have a strong sense of ‘who they are’.

Often, people like this are far more able to be different, to take risks, to buck the trend ...

In our two readings we encounter people who have a strong sense of personal identity – they know who they are.

John the Baptist

To live like John the Baptist you had to have some sense of inner conviction.

Of course, some people who live differently do so out of a profound sense of insecurity – so they put on a front, a face to the world that portrays bravado.

I suspect not the case with John ... there was something consistent in John ... even when challenged, he stuck to his course.

John's encounter with priests, Levites and Pharisees reveals John's acute sense of his calling.

Apart from anything else, he knew who he was not ...

Isaiah similarly suggests a strong sense of who he was called to be.

He knew himself to be a person 'anointed and appointed' ...

Now this could have come across as arrogance, as over-confidence, as claiming too much for himself.

After all anointing was often for the high and the holy – kings were anointed ... priests were anointed ...

Isaiah's experience can be ours ... and points to a key element of biblical faith.

The bible doesn't quite suggest that 'know yourself' is the key to philosophy. It is much more 'know your God'.

We find our identity, who we are, in, through and from God ...

This is what gives both Isaiah and John their sense of who they are ... it is a question of who they are called to be by God ... who God has anointed them to be, what God has appointed them to do.

Inner conviction

Inner strength

Inner security

How do we prevent that from turning into pride and arrogance?

How do we square that with the call to humility?

Again, we can learn from John and from Isaiah:

From John – John knew that whatever his role in the world, it was always to point beyond himself to Jesus ...

John knew that the point of his ministry was to point away from himself and not to himself.

And the same is true for us in our mission in the world. It is always to point towards Jesus.

From Isaiah – Isaiah knew that he had been called to serve the poor and the captive ...

Isaiah knew himself to be anointed and appointed, but not to further his own ends. Rather to speak to and for the poor, the imprisoned, the broken ...

And the same is true for us in our following of Jesus. We are anointed and appointed, and so find security within that calling ... but it is never a calling to serve ourselves, but to live for those who might be seen as the poor and the outsiders.

We see these two both embodied in Jesus himself –

- he lived only to glorify God the Father

- he echoed these words of Isaiah to summarise his mission

So we can live secure and firm in the knowledge that we have been appointed and anointed ... but always pointing to Christ, and always seeking to serve the poor and the broken.