

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Today I would like to focus on our passage from Isaiah and consider what it is telling us about the God we worship.

The first thing to notice is the language used to show that God is far greater than we could possibly consider.

I did a quick Google search to try to find out

how much water is in the oceans. The numbers are just staggering, 300 Million cubic miles, 1.3 billion cubic kilometres. One page even gave the number of gallons, but when I try to understand a 21 digit number my mind just can't take it in.

Even if we say that the Israelites would possibly have considered just the Mediterranean as the seas, that's still 4.4 million cubic kilometres of water. That's about 25 Olympic swimming pools for each resident of the UK.

We are then told that God can measure this by using the hollow of his hand.

He looks at the islands and considers them like dust. The mountains and hills he can weigh in a hand held set of balances.

If we try to think of God as a human, we miss the amazing awesomeness that is our God. He is not a human, even a super-scaled human. He is the creator of the universe, placing and naming every star and yet also

aware of every bird and flower.

The passage then goes on to talk about God's thoughts. It mocks the suggestion that we might be able to tell God what he should be doing.

When you think about it, it is truly laughable. Most of us have trouble knowing what we should be doing half the time, so to be able to make suggestions to the one in charge of the universe about the best way to do things certainly goes way beyond what I would be capable of. If I was to try to advise God and “show him the path of understanding” then I'm pretty sure I wouldn't want to live in the mess that would result.

The second section of our reading actually goes back to the beginning of the chapter, before our reading started. The chapter starts “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God”. We now seem to be getting to the reason why the writer has been extolling God's magnificence. It appears that the Israelites were feeling that God wasn't

paying them any attention, that they had been abandoned by God.

Isaiah comforts them that God has not had to take a breather, he's not too tired to listen to them. Then comes a passage that has given hope to countless struggling people through the ages:

Do you not know, have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God, the
creator of the ends of the Earth.
He will not grow tired or weary, and his
understanding no one can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary and
increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary, and
young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the Lord will renew
their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles; they
will run and not grow weary, they will walk
and not be faint. (28-31)

When you think that you have nothing more to give, that there is nothing else you can do, you need to remember that you are not

alone. Our God assures us that he will renew our strength, and not just to where it was. We will run and not grow weary; we will walk, even up the hill to Newsholme, and not be faint.

I'm not sure that I believe this is necessarily physical strength though. Much as I like the thought of being able to run for miles without feeling tired, I know that my body is not up to that. I think though that this is more to do with the ability to press on through difficulties. It's the ability to continue when a loved one is diagnosed with dementia and starts to forget or get confused about what is going on. The ability to show love to others even when all you really want to do is shout and cry. The ability to trust God when everything around you appears to be falling apart or you've been unable to leave the house for 3 months.

This is not just a promise for the Israelites though. "The Lord is the everlasting God". That means there was never a time when he didn't yet exist, there will never be a time

when he ceases to exist. It also means that his promises last as long. He has given this statement about those that hope in the Lord which is not a limited time-scale but will be true for as long as there are those that hope in Him.

However, if you need any further encouragement, it comes in our gospel reading. Jesus is speaking with his disciples after his resurrection. I wonder what they thought of the task that Jesus had just set them? "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."(19) There is so much in there that we take for granted, but which would have been totally outside their understanding.

Go and make disciples. OK, they knew about disciples, disciples would follow an individual and learn from them. But normally it would be the disciple that would approach the one they wanted to learn from not the other way round. They would be more used to welcoming disciples than making disciples.

... From all nations. Now things are starting to get odd. Jews were for the Jews. An occasional non-Jew would request admittance to become a Jew, but the Jews would not particularly reach out to them, in fact they would go out of their way to avoid anyone that was not a Jew. Now Jesus is telling them that they are to go to all nations to make disciples.

Finally this command to “baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. They would have understood The Father to mean God, the Lord that the Jews worshipped. The Son they had been coming to realise meant Jesus. The Holy Spirit would have been the least understood. Jesus had promised that he was going to send them the Spirit (John 14:15-27) and we celebrated the initial outpouring last week with Pentecost. However, to the disciples there, that was all in the future so they would not have been entirely sure what Jesus was actually talking about.

However it would have been the combining of all 3 together that would have sounded strangest to them. We have had 2000 years to accept that God is present in the trinity. We still sometimes struggle to understand it, to put it into words, but we accept it as a fundamental part of our faith, a part of the Creed we believe. We have been baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We close each service with a blessing in the name of the Trinity. We believe in the Trinitarian God that the original disciples accepted despite any uncertainty and taught.

However, Jesus doesn't stop there. The religious authorities had just persecuted and killed Jesus and now he was sending his disciples out to continue and expand his ministry. They must have wondered if they were up to the task, so he gives them a promise of reassurance. “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”.

Jesus, the part of God that was physically present on Earth, has promised his presence

with us. That means that we can be trust that God in all his attributes is with us. God has not left us, we don't have to worry, as the Israelites in Isaiah's time did, that God has abandoned us. And we can take assurance that however bad things are, if we trust in the Lord, the astounding God that Isaiah describes, he will renew our strength and we will soar like eagles.