



Sermon

Hope in Disaster

Isaiah 2:1-5

27th November 2022

© 2022 Peter Lloyd

The first time I heard the first chapter of Isaiah read is forever etched into my mind. Isaiah 1: 14-17 was read with real anger in the reader's voice.

Do you find the same thing when you are watching the News at night? The senseless murder of a man doing a good deed to help a friend and look after his shop; The wanton destruction of the economy by the Taliban resulting in parents having to sell their children into slavery so that the rest of the family will not starve; Russia's unprovoked attack on the Ukraine. How dare anyone treat other people like that!

God is furious with His people because their hands are full of blood. (1:15 last sentence)

But note verse 18. Here the voice of that first reader changed as he read of God's desire to forgive. The old Authorised Version reads, "Come now let us reason together says the Lord," says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool."

God had no desire to act in judgement!

It was a powerful piece of reading that has stayed with me right up to the present day. God warned. God pleaded. God did all that could be done to save the people from their own folly, but it was all to no avail and God was left with no option but to perform the spiritual surgery needed to cut the cancer out of the Nation so that they could live on to fulfil their destiny.

When that judgement happened, the people were stunned. God seemed to have failed in his promises. God had let them down. God wasn't as powerful as they were led to believe. How could this be so?

It was against that background of crushing despair that our reading for today comes in. There is always hope in God. It was as if God said, "Let Me show you once again what I have planned for you," and outlines in Chapter 2 all that He has planned for His people.

Over the past few weeks, we have been greatly privileged to have two of our parishioners share the experience of what it is like to lose a loved one. Two books have been offered to us. They are not easy reading. But they tell the story of what it is like to live through the devastation of grief. One was written after a sudden death, the other of the slow loss that dementia brings. There is great beauty and deep sorrow but

there is real hope because of the Faith that each of the writers have. There is real grief but there is also hope just as Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 4: 13.

What Isaiah is doing is offering the same hope amid the crushing despair of the exile by showing what God is working towards. There are three things Isaiah notes.

1. Rather than the destruction of the Temple and the belittling of the mountain on which it stands it will be exalted above all the mountains.
2. Israel's destiny is to prepare the way for ALL nations to come to God. Everyone will want to know about the God of Israel because they will have seen the wonder of a life lived in obedience to God. That is why Israel's betrayal is so devastating. Rather than be significantly different from the world around them God's people look the same as the Nations around them. Why would they want to hear God's word when it looks no better than what they already know.
3. Because God will set all things in order between Nations, peace will reign. Weapons of war that destroy life will repurposed to produce life giving food. There will be no need to train for war. Israel is being directed to lift her eyes above the costly and painful reality that they are living to see the mighty purpose God has for them.

This destiny shows why the people of God must live in a way that shows the beauty and love of the Creator of the world. The one God who above all other so-called gods makes sense of the horror and the wonder of the world in which we live.

We too have a similar destiny. Advent is the season when we look ahead to the final destiny of the world God made.

The life of Jesus tells us what we were designed to be like. Everything Jesus did as a human being we can begin to grow into. We are given an individual purpose for living. No matter what life throws at us we can still have hope because of all that Jesus has shown us.

The Cross tells us that we can be forgiven. The problem of my own wrongdoing is dealt with. No longer do I have to carry with me the burden of guilt over my own sin. Neither do I have to be concerned about my identity. I am a child of the Living God. The Creator of all that is has stooped down and in great humility invited me to accept all that He has done for me and thus to call Him Father.

The Resurrection tells me that God will fulfil His purpose because that is what He did in Jesus. St Paul goes to great length to show us that what was promised in Abraham and all the scriptures has come to fruition in Jesus. God's faithfulness is assured. God's faithfulness will be shown to be just as real when all that He has promised for us comes to pass.

As a child of God, I am now also a member of God's family, the Church. I belong. I have brothers and Sisters who will walk with me through all that life can throw at me.

As a member of that family, I have a task to do. I am to seek out the gifts God has given to me, find out where best to serve Him and join God in His task of serving the world around me.

When Jesus returns, He will set all things right. We will become what we were meant to be. The whole creation that groans as if in childbirth (Romans 8: 22) now. When Jesus returns, all will be set to rights. To continue Paul's picture the child will be born healthy and well and rejoicing will replace the anguish of childbirth.

Advent invites us to look at the mighty acts of God once again and rejoice in them. We are to be a people of praise. We gladly join in the worship of God because we are celebrating with awe, His absolute faithfulness. It is not the time when we argue for the truth of these things but rather to worship the God who has given us so much.

There are two dangers with truths like this. One is to take it too seriously, the other is to not take it seriously enough.

If we take it too seriously, we will try to produce this Kingdom now. That is the problem with Communism. With the vision of a world where all people are equal, we then begin to force people into our version of the vision. Without God, it fails as we have seen in the collapse of Communist Russia and any other regime like it.

For us we can too easily begin to believe we can build the perfect Church with imperfect people. It can't be done. Only as God is allowed to transform us into His original intention for us will that happen

Well, if it is all too difficult why bother at all? Obviously, this will only happen when Jesus returns so we have no responsibility to make it happen now. We have our Faith. We are safe in God. That is enough. We can leave the rest up to Him.

But there is a middle way between these two. We do all that we can to be the people that God intends us to be. We are not reduced to servile obedience but gladly obey the God who has given so much to restore our relationship with Him. We will do all we can to defeat injustice. We will do all we can to use the creation under God's direction and correct out misusing's of the Earth. We will treat others of all races and those of our own race as if they were our sisters and brothers.

In all of this we will be looking for and cooperating with the Holy Spirit as He transforms us into the image bearers we are supposed to be. We will be seen as a people of hope and a people of rejoicing, a people of peace and a people of justice.

All of this will be summed up in the word LOVE; the love that was shown to us in the Cross. It will be characterised by that love lived in the power of the Resurrection.

That is the meaning of HOPE. Not power in the sky by and by but love made real in our day to day lives.