

Worship @ home

14 April 2024

Call to worship: Isaiah 61 vv 1 – 3

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of splendour... so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.

These prophetic words are a reminder for us of God's promise of salvation; they are also a reminder that a time of mourning will pass and a new beginning will come; so let us give God the worship and praise for all he has done for us as we sing:

Hymn: All my hope in God is founded

Opening Prayer:

Our Father in heaven, we come into your presence this morning to offer you our worship and our praises for all you have done for us in Jesus. We claim the promise Jesus made to his disciples, that where two or three are gathered in his name, he will be in the midst of them. We are aware that there are many in our world who are broken hearted, many who are mourning, many who are held captive, but we believe that you are in all those situations showing your love, grace and mercy to all, on those who know you and those who don't. We pray at the start of this hour that our heart-felt worship will be a sweet sound in your ear and that you will stay close to us and by your Holy Spirit you empower us to be gospel messengers beyond these doors. Receive our worship, for we pray in the name of Jesus, our Risen Saviour. Amen

Introduction

We are still in the season of Easter, so the Scripture readings relate to what happened after the resurrection, specifically to that moment when Jesus and Peter had a heart to heart and how that meeting was the life changing root of Peter's ministry going forward. As we shall hear, each of our readings includes an invitation to trust God, to obey Jesus, to love as they love and there is a reference to God's readiness to forgive. There is also a definite indication for those who are obedient living life as God requires will have everlasting life. I think too that the scriptures call us to not turn our backs on Resurrection Day, but to keep it in view all day, every day for believing that Jesus lives is the only Way to eternity with him for us.

Hymn: The Church is wherever God's people are praising

Prayers and Lord's Prayer – Father God who is in heaven

Lord God, Father of us all, our words are inadequate in describing all that you are; yet you are the very source of all that is perfect and true and your vastness of your love astounds us.

Father, we praise you for the freedom you have secured for us in Jesus; freedom not to satisfy our own selfish desires, putting ourselves first, but to be the people you have always wanted us to be. Again, we praise you for the promise that we shall be free in Jesus, that through our faith and trust in him we can know your love for us.

As come to given thanks, take a moment and thank God for all that has occurred during the last week – the good and the not so good.

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you most humble and hearty thanks for all your good ness and loving kindness to us and to all your people. We bless you for our cretin, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for you immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And give us, we pray, such a sense of all your mercies that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we show for your praise, not only with our lips but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days. And Father as we offer you our thanks and praise we are mindful of the fact that we haven't always lived in the way you would have us live; we have sinned against you and against your people. In thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, for give us all that is past; and grant that we may serve you in newness of life, to the glory of your name. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory. Amen

Reading: Isaiah 55 vv 1 – 8

Reflection: Don't refuse the invitation

Whilst these prophetic words from Isaiah are a continuation of Isaiah's vision of how the promised Messiah will suffer for God's people from 53 onwards, they also sort of pre-empt the outline of the commission God gave to Jesus at the start of his ministry that I read from Isaiah 61. Written during the time of the Israelites being in captivity in Babylon prior to the Persian conquest in 539BC the writer draws attention to God's continuous presence amongst his people in an effort to remind them of God's Covenant and of his promise that they will return home to Jerusalem. Commentators suggest that some of the Israelites had become quite settled in Babylon, cosying up to their captors and having the freedom to do and to be as the Babylonians, going against what God had asked of them. The reminder comes in the form of invitations and for the writer they are imperatives – must dos for the Jews: Come to God, listen to what he says, see what he has done, and seek him for he is the way to salvation!

The first five verses remind me of the parable of the wedding banquet Jesus told, and I could easily start to sing the song about it; but that would be frivolous given the severity of Isaiah's prophetic invitation to the banquet of God as there is to be much at stake. There is something of the 'end times' in the prophecy as the writer suggest that at God's timing when all God's faithful and obedient people are gathered in the Messiah – Jesus will be present and will preside at the head of the banqueting table.

Notice: The invitation in verse one is an open invitation to the hungry and thirsty – Come – it's a free meal. The people's best in this case doesn't satisfy – they spend their ill-gotten-gains from their captors, eating what is forbidden; whilst God always supplies the best, for those who are obedient and true to him as they refrain from eating food offered to idols and other gods. So the invitation is for the Jews to turn back to God, and to worship only him. There is also a hint that the return to Jerusalem will come sooner if the people begin again with God; if not the return will be delayed.

Notice in verse 3 to 5 Isaiah's reminder to the people of God's covenantal promise of salvation through David, (the earthly king God called, blessed and commissioned.) He states clearly that God's plan will be completely fulfilled in due time. Isaiah knew that all 'timing' is in God's hands; and most likely the people living at that moment would not see or experience God's promise. But I think Isaiah pressed home the fact that the people had to live in such a way realising that the Messiah could come un-expectantly on one day during their lifetime. So they had to be

prepared and be in Jerusalem where people from every nation will come to worship the Lord their God.

Notice in verses 6 – 8 that the prophet Isaiah is fond of repetition, so in these verses the invitation to the heavenly banquet is accompanied with the invitation to the nation to repent of their disobedience of what God required of them. He repeats too God's promise to have mercy on each penitent and to forgive; giving his listeners another opportunity to turn away from the ways of the Babylonians and turn back to God.

It's as if each of the invitations are stepping stones calling the Jews back into the fold; giving them an opportunity to start over, to put right their relationship with God. It seems to me that the prophet is sort of giving the Jews a warning to get their act together if they want to return to Jerusalem. For those who want to stay in Babylon they will not be spared from whatever comes their way via invading forces.

This prophecy reminds us that the salvation of all humanity is / was to come through God's action in sending Jesus; so here Isaiah reminded the Jews again of God's covenant that the salvation of humanity has again been revealed to the whole nation of Israel, and will be worked out by the Messiah from David's line in due time and God will keep his promise.

What about us today? Well I believe that we live within a nation that has totally lost sight of God, of the commandments and of the Shema. It is as if it is every man / woman for themselves. Selfishness – me – me – me – and if there is anything left over me again, the worship of self has overtaken the concern and the needs of those less fortunate than any of us. In today's society, it isn't only the really hungry, thirsty, homeless and poor who turn up whenever there is something for free, it is those who have enough or more. But many of us have the mentality that we are entitled and forget our calling. Remember the Shema – love God first, others second and self: last and care for the poor the widow, the orphan and the alien. We forget to put our trust in God who is / will be present in our lives and will supply our every need as we live in obedience to his will. In some ways Isaiah's vision prompts us to look at how we live day to day, calling us to think about being ready for that moment when Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead that the Apostle John speaks of in the Book of Revelation as well as giving us the assurance that God is ever present and for love of us will forgive those who turn to him prompting us not to refuse the invitation.

Hymn: Through the love of God our Saviour

Reflection: The wonder of forgiveness

I don't know if you have a favourite account of the resurrection and of the encounters Jesus had with his disciples in the days and weeks following. My most favourite is the story of doubting Thomas that we read last week as it reveals to us the fallibility of humanity. My second favourite is that of the life changing and commissioning conversation between Jesus and Peter.

Readings: John 21 vv 1 – 14

We know the familiar account of Peter's denial of knowing Jesus very well. We know too that each of the gospel writers tell slightly different stories of those who Jesus met on the day of resurrection, the days after and where. Some mention Peter's part in their story:

- Matthew's gospel – Jesus refers to 'his brothers' no one is specifically mentioned.
- Mark's gospel – the angel at the tomb told the women (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome) to go tell Jesus' disciples and Peter that Jesus was going ahead of them into Galilee and there they will see him.
- Luke's gospel – the women who attended the tomb saw an angel who told them that Jesus had risen. They went back to tell the disciples but they didn't believe them. 'Peter, however,

