

**Sermon**  
**15 November 2015**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

**By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald**

**Text: Isaiah 2:1-5**

**Speak out: 10,000 voices for change**

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Most people today regard it as very important to plan for their personal future. We take out life-insurance, make sure that we belong to pension schemes, buy funeral plans, insure our belongings, have savings accounts, and so forth. Why? Because as far as possible we want to make sure that things will turn out okay for us; because we want to be in control of our lives; because unexpected things happen...

And I was reminded how very important this is just yesterday evening... We have a South African couple visiting us at the moment. Luckily we got a wee break from the rain yesterday and we decided to take them for a scenic run in the car, up to Dunkeld and back home through Crieff – and they were so excited, because for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in their lives they saw snow! They even made André stop to throw snowballs at each other when we were up in the mountains!

But then, because the roads are so wet, in some places there are potholes under the puddles, and we drove through one. And lost a tyre... Luckily we are members of the AA, so we weren't stranded. All it took was one phone call and help was on the way!

We try to plan as best we can for the unforeseeable future.

But then, of course, we also very often find ourselves in situations we're not particularly pleased with. This is usually the result of what is going on in the economy or due to decisions politicians make. And then, because there isn't much we can really do about the situation we find ourselves in – we complain.

And my oh my, are we good at *that!* If the person or the team we support in sports doesn't win, we usually have a mouthful to say about the coach; if the government make decisions we don't agree with, we let everybody who wants to listen know *what*, according to us, they *should* be doing, and how different things would have been if our party won!

We are experts at criticising and complaining. But we don't very often go out of our way to try and change the situation – sometimes because there really is nothing we can do about it, but sometimes just because it's easier to stand at the side and criticise.

But today we can do things a little differently. Instead of complaining and criticising the Church for its conduct in our country and the world, we can have a say, we can help to plan for the future.

The Church of Scotland wants all its members to have input in its planning for the future. They don't want to only make decisions from the top down, but they want to know what all of us, here on the ground level, would like to see happening.

The Church of Scotland is taking a long-term approach to tackling inequality and injustice. Over the next ten years, it will bring about change in some of the most critical issues facing our nation and planet. And in order to get this right, the Church wants the people of Scotland to help to set their priorities.

This autumn the Church and Society Council is asking people in local churches – us – and in every part of Scottish society, people from every walk of life, to help them develop new ideas and priorities to work on in the future.

They want to hear from 10,000 people about what will make the biggest difference.

They are saying:

*It is 2035. Scotland is a fairer, more equal and more just society in a fairer, more equal and more just world. Take your time and imagine what this would look and feel like.*

At the end of the sermon you will get the opportunity to make a suggestion in this regard. The Church will gather everyone's suggestions and identify 6 key areas for action. They will then commit themselves to work every day to bring these changes about – locally, nationally and internationally – in every part of Scotland, for at least the next ten years.

So today we get the opportunity to have a say in future events that will make a difference in our lives, so let's grab this opportunity with both hands – because our future is really important.

It's so easy to lose hope and say – what's becoming of this world? Bombs go off; guns are fired at innocent people; aeroplanes fall due to terrorist actions... Where is it all going to end?

But we shouldn't lose hope, because God is present in our world, despite war and conflict.

The prophet Isaiah, in a time when things weren't going well for the people of God, in a time of war and conflict, spoke words of encouragement and hope. He said that there will come a time when people will realise that God is in control of their lives.

When they will stop fighting with each other and rather go to him for guidance, a time when swords will be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks – in other words, a time when weapons that are used to destroy the enemy and defend against the enemy, will be turned into something practical and useful. When something that is used to take a life, will be changed into an implement that is helpful in sustaining life.

If we don't want to lose our way in the world, we need to remember this, to trust in God. The people who lived in Isaiah's time looked up to the mountain of the Lord for reassurance, for direction.

We need something to focus on if we don't want to get lost in this world.

I saw a program on telly a wee while ago, one of these reality shows, in which they tested what will happen if you can't see or hear where you are going. Two guys were put in a field. They were told to walk straight

across the field to the gate at the other side, which under normal circumstances would be very easy to do. But then they were given soundproof headphones and they were blindfolded.

And that turned a very straight forward task into a tremendously difficult one.

Guess what happened? They both started off quite well, but then started walking in circles. Neither of them was able to get even close to the gate.

If you can't see or hear where you are going – you are going to tire yourself out walking around in circles all the time. You are going to lose your way, and at the same time probably lose hope too.

But if we keep our eyes focused on God, on his love for us, we will never lose our way. We'll reach our destination without losing direction.

We'll remember that God can do anything. That he can change situations, that he can change lives, that he can bring new life, that he can bring hope. That he can change swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks.

Our future is in his hands. And to get there, Isaiah says, we need to walk in the light of the Lord. He will show us the way to go, if we look at him for direction, if we listen to him for instructions. His light will guide our paths every step of the way.

So let's focus on God and his plans with us here on earth. And let's try not to only criticise on the way to our final destination, but to contribute.

Let's have our say. Let's not get stuck. Where change is needed, change is possible. Because God can do anything.

Let's live like people who believe this.

Amen