

**Sermon**  
**6 March 2016**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

**By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald**

**Text: Isaiah 40:9-14 & 28-31**

**Baptism & Holy Communion**

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*Do you not know? Have you not heard?*

Words of the prophet Isaiah to the people of God in exile in Babylon. They were far away from home, and he was trying to encourage them. Reminding them that God was there with them.

They were all supposed to know this very well, because from the moment a child could understand, they were taught about God's unfailing love for them, what this meant in their daily existence, and that in return all God wanted was for them to be loyal to him in everything they said and did.

I think being a prophet in Israel probably felt very similar to being a *parent* – to a very large family!

Parents need to teach their kids so many things. But as all the parents here will know very well, that is not always an easy task! Sometimes it feels as if I have to say something very near a *million* times before my boys take it in!

Usually when the boys come in from outside, they will kick off their shoes and leave them lying at the front door. If their daddy then does exactly the same thing, and the doorbell unexpectedly rings – which I know, from experience, happens more than once every single day – the person at the door just about break their neck falling over all the shoes, and I feel embarrassed.

And if I then smile at the person at the door politely and look at the boys with angry eyes and say: “Why did you not put your shoes away properly?” Without fail, both of them will reply: “*But I didn’t know* I had to do it!” They didn’t know, because I didn’t ask them to do it *again* for the umpteenth time!

*Did you not know? Have you not heard?*

Tim Hansel, in his book “When I Relax I Feel Guilty”, writes: An American Indian was in downtown New York, walking with his friend who lived in New York City. Suddenly he said, “I hear a cricket.” “Oh, you’re crazy,” his friend replied. “No, I hear a cricket. I do! I’m sure of it.”

“It’s the noon hour. There are people bustling around, cars honking, taxis squealing, noises from the city. I’m sure you can’t hear it.” “I’m sure I do.” He listened attentively and then walked to the corner, across the street, and looked all around. Finally on the corner he found a shrub in a large cement planter. He dug beneath the leaves and found a cricket.

His friend was astounded. But the American Indian said, “No. My ears are no different from yours. It simply depends on what you are listening for. Here, let me show you.”

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of change...And he dropped it on the concrete. Every head within a block turned. "You see what I mean?" he said as he began picking up his coins. "It all depends on what you are listening for."

As Christians, we need to learn what we should listen for.

Through Isaiah God was speaking to his people. Saying the same thing over and over again: "Repent, turn your lives around, live in devotion to me." But did they listen? No. They didn't really think that they needed God.

And this we can see all through Isaiah chapters 1-39. God's warnings. Israel ignoring him. And *then* the Babylonians came, like God said they would.

The rest of the book of Isaiah was written when the Israelites were in captivity. Differently from what we probably would have done, God doesn't now all of a sudden point his finger at his people and say: "I told you so!" No. Through his prophet he comforts them.

Comfort. Did you know that idea of comfort comes from the two Latin words: "com" & "fortis"? Which literally translated means "with strength"?

God's way of giving *comfort* is to give us the *strength* to do what needs to be done. As his strength comes, grief and sorrow go. The situation may not have changed, but we have a new ability to face it and deal with it.

That's what God did for his people all those many years ago, and that is what God still does for us today.

Listen how Isaiah describes God comforting his people, comforting *us*.

Listen:

<sup>29</sup> *He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.*

<sup>30</sup> *Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;*

<sup>31</sup> *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.*

Did you *hear* that? With God in our lives we will be able to handle *anything!* Because He loves us and promises to always take care of us. And *how* will He do that?

Isaiah says:

<sup>11</sup> *He tends his flock like a shepherd:  
he gathers the lambs in his arms  
and carries them close to his heart;  
he gently leads those that have young.*

And to me this is one of the most amazing metaphors used to describe God in the Bible.

To be a shepherd in those days was not a very glamorous job. Lots of people looked down on shepherds, but at the same time they were dependent on them, because most families had a sheep or two, and these needed to be taken care of – by a shepherd!

Shepherds worked hard. They were never off duty, and their main job was to ensure that their flock was safe and had enough to eat and drink, which wasn't always very easy in the hot and dry land they lived in. If in danger they would protect their flock with their lives.

Can you see why God is described as a Good Shepherd? Because he does all those things for *us*. He doesn't care about the long hours and the hard, unthankful job, because he loves us. He "gathers his lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart". Isn't that just so very special?

This morning God picked up his wee lamb ....., and as he grows up God will carry him close to his heart. At the same time he will lead ..... and ..... gently, and by example teach them how to be good parents.

All you need to do, ..... and ....., is *listen* to these words of God, and *know* that it is true. Because God knows where he is going. And if the two of you follow The Shepherd, ..... will do the same, which means that he will never get lost.

Isaiah asked: "Do you not know? Have you not heard?"

This morning we *heard*, and now we *know*; and in a few minutes we are also going to see and *taste* just how much our Good Shepherd loves us.

May God give us the grace to never forget this...

Amen