

Sermon
7 June 2020
West Kirk of Calder/Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Reading: Isaiah 41:8-13

Hymn: MP 225 He's got the whole wide world

READING

Isaiah 41:8-13

⁸ 'But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
you descendants of Abraham my friend,

⁹ I took you from the ends of the earth,
from its farthest corners I called you.

I said, "You are my servant";
I have chosen you and have not rejected you.

¹⁰ So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

¹¹ 'All who rage against you
will surely be ashamed and disgraced;
those who oppose you
will be as nothing and perish.

¹² Though you search for your enemies,
you will not find them.

Those who wage war against you
will be as nothing at all.

¹³ For I am the Lord your God
who takes hold of your right hand
and says to you, Do not fear;
I will help you.

MESSAGE:

What is on your mind most of the time these days?

Are you wondering when all this is going to end? If it's even ever going to end?! Are you worried about your own, or somebody's else's health? About your finances? About the future?

Are you feeling overwhelmed? Tired? Or bored? Lonely? Even scared?

We might be the first people in history to go through a Covid-19 pandemic, but we are not the first people in history to experience these feelings...

Going all the way back to Old Testament times, the people of God also found themselves in situations they didn't want to be in... One of these situations was the Babylonian exile.

That's the setting for our reading from Isaiah.

The people of God were taken into captivity, forced to live in a foreign land, where people spoke a foreign language and had a completely

different culture. They had to work as slaves for a foreign government; but their biggest issue was the fact that felt far away from God.

Please remember that this took place long before Jesus came to earth. And in those days, they believed that God *resided* in the temple in Jerusalem. A temple that wasn't even standing anymore.

They felt lost. Scared. Alone.

It was one thing to be so far away from home, but to be so far away from God – THAT they really struggled with. Because their whole lives revolved around the temple. Everything they did, everything that was important to them, all their rules and regulations, were founded upon the law of God.

Nothing made sense to them anymore. They missed the house of God, being in his presence, and sharing this with each other...

Now doesn't that sound terribly familiar?

Completely different time, completely different situation – but we can't get to our churches at the moment either. And we miss it. We long to meet there again, to experience the fellowship of believers, to praise God, listen to his word, and feel surrounded by his presence.

But the lesson God's people had to learn all those years ago, was that God doesn't live in the temple. God is everywhere. And that has never changed. In Jesus and through his Holy Spirit he came even closer to us.

Our churches might be closed, but God is still with us. Everywhere, all the time.

And this is what the prophet of God was telling his people, and what he is still telling us today.

God is with you. There where you are this morning. Alone in your home, or only with your closest family around you. God is with you when you are confined to your house, *and* when you have to go out. God is with you when you are celebrating, *and* when you are mourning. God is with you now, and he always will be.

And if you need a reminder of this – just read the Bible. Remember what happened in history. No matter what was going on, God has NEVER left his people alone. And he never will – that is his promise to us.

As we read in verse 13: “For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you: Do not fear; I will help you.”

God is our Father, we are his children.

What do young children do when they feel scared or uncertain? Without even thinking about it, they reach out to their parents and take hold of their hands. And then they feel save.

They don't analyse what they are doing. They don't ask themselves: “So, if I take hold of my mum's hand now, will she remember to not let go? Does she even know what she is doing?” They don't do that.

A child trusts a parent blindly. With his or her whole heart. Hand in hand with a beloved grown-up, children feel as if they can conquer the world! They don't feel sad, they don't feel scared – they feel bold, brave, and most importantly – safe. Even when they don't understand what is going on.

My boys may be 10 and 13 now, but I'll never forget the feeling of those wee hands reaching up to my own. The warmth and security / felt when they trusted me to keep them safe.

And they'll be mortified to know I told you this – but they still sometimes come and cuddle up next to me on the couch, more so recently during lockdown, because subconsciously they need to be reassured that they are not alone.

We call ourselves children of God. Let's *act* like *children* of God. Let's put our small, insignificant hands into his outstretched, almighty hand, and hold on. And boldly face the future, because no matter what happens, we will be fine, because we are not alone.

God's people didn't stay in exile forever. He promised them that they would be able to return home one day, and they did.

We don't know when things will go back to normal for us, or what that "normal" will look like, but let's stop worrying about this and trust God.

He's got us.

Amen

PRAYER

By André Groenewald

Loving Father, although You keep telling us to fear not, we still struggle with fear. Sometimes we have to admit that fear replace faith in our hearts, sometimes we struggle to see Your presence among us...

Thank You for Your promise to be with us always, to strengthen us, to be with us and to uphold us with Your righteous right hand, for which we praise you.

Forgive us all the times that we allow fear to cloud our judgment and our vision of you.

We ask this in the Name of **Jesus who taught us to pray,**

ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.

HYMN

MP 225:1&3

He's got the whole wide world, in his hands

He's got the whole wide world, in his hands

He's got the whole wide world, in his hands

He's got the whole world in his hands.

He's got you and me brother, in his hands

He's got you and me sister, in his hands

He's got you and me brother, in his hands

He's got the whole world in his hands.