

SERMON – 30/10/22
'God's amazing plan'

Isaiah 2:1-5

“He will teach us His ways so that we may walk in His paths.”
(Isaiah 2:3)

Last week, as we started reading the Book of the Prophet Isaiah together we quickly discovered that he doesn't mince his words. In the very opening chapter he addressed the state of the nation – in his case the nation of Judah – and he makes it clear that although the people were quick to point the finger at their leaders for the mess they were in as a country, the population at large is every bit as much to blame. They have failed to listen to God's Word, they have rebelled against God's ways and instead of plodding on with their insufferably hypocritical worship, Isaiah calls them to repentance, proclaiming the good news of salvation that would ultimately be experienced in its fulness when the Messiah came. God's promise is this: “You are stained red with sin but I will wash you as clean as snow. Although your stains are deep red you will be as white as wool.” (v.18)

Continuing his introduction to the book in the following chapters from which we read the opening verses this morning, Isaiah offers the people of Judah in his time and us in our time a vision of a future that is light years better than what threatens to be coming down the track, and it's that vision that I want to hold up for you this morning. It's a vision of what Jesus will later call the Kingdom of God, which is something that we should focus on much more tenaciously than we often do.

Last year when we were engaged in the Growing Young programme, one of the models that was given to us for moving church life forward positively was that of the NASA space programme of the 1960s. Very early in the process, an image that was used to inspire staff was a picture of a person in a space suit planting an American flag on the surface of the moon. This is what we are aiming for, they were told, and it really encapsulated the vision. Apparently, on one occasion when the President was making a visit to the space centre he stopped in a corridor to speak to a manual worker who was wielding a broom. The

president asked the man what work he did and the man replied, 'I'm working to put someone from our country on the moon.' Even though his day job was to sweep the office corridors, he had caught the vision of what the whole space programme was about. And of course in the fulness of time the Americans *did* fly to the moon and we've all seen the picture of Neil Armstrong (a freeman of the Burgh of Langholm, by the way) planting the flag in the moon dust.

I wonder if we have caught the vision of the Kingdom of God which one day God will just as surely establish? Let's look at what Isaiah said in our reading this morning.

Firstly he speaks about the mountain of the Lord's Temple being exalted above all other hills and all nations streaming to it. For the people of Judah in Isaiah's time that would probably have been understood in a 'Make Israel Great Again' kind of way – the mountain of the Lord's Temple was Mount Zion in Jerusalem and if it was to be exalted above all other hills, surely that must mean that Israel's armies were going to triumph and its frontiers pushed back like they were when King David was on the throne. No. Actually, Isaiah was offering a much greater vision than that. In reality, about a hundred years after Isaiah's death, Jerusalem fell completely, the Temple was destroyed and the people were carried off into exile in Babylon, and although a second Temple was built when the exiles returned and it stood right until the time of Jesus, it too was destroyed in AD70 and all that remains of it today is what is known as the Wailing Wall. No, Jesus spoke about the temple being His body which would be destroyed but in three days raised again, and it is the risen Christ who is the Temple of the living God, the mountain of the Lord, exalted above all others, to whom all nations will one day stream. That is the vision Isaiah offers and which is being fulfilled in our own time with the Kingdom of God expanding as thousands of millions of people across the world acknowledge Jesus to be their Saviour and Lord.

Secondly Isaiah describes how God's Word will go out from Jerusalem and that God's ways will be taught so that people like us may walk in His paths. However that may have been understood in the prophet's own time, this foreshadows the

coming of Christ (as so much in this Book does) – following His resurrection Jesus told His followers to wait until they were given the Holy Spirit, when they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And as they went history tells us that the message of God's Word spread like wildfire. In fact it still does. It's countries like ours that are the exception, where churches are declining and the Gospel is being silenced – how we need to pray for a recovery of the old fire and for a fresh realisation of Isaiah's vision in our time. If we will let God's Spirit hold sway in our lives, the words of our text will be fulfilled: "The Lord will teach us His ways so that we may walk in His paths."

But finally, Isaiah holds out for us what is probably the most inspiring aspect of the vision – a vision, incidentally that does not only appear here but is also found in the prophecy of Micah – God's perfect justice will prevail and as a result disputes between individuals and nations will be consigned to history, there will be no more need for weapons so they can be turned into farm implements to feed people instead of killing them, and no more will there be any need to train soldiers. War will be no more and all people will walk in the light of the Lord. Doesn't that prospect cause your heart to sing? It does mine. Do you want to be a part of that?

Well come, says Isaiah. Come with people of all nations – Jews and Arabs, black and white, men and women, Hutu and Tutsi, Sunni and Shia, Russian and Ukrainian, Hindu and Buddhist, Afghans, Chinese, Syrians, Yemenis, Protestants and Catholics, us and them, anybody you care to think of. In Christ the dividing wall of separation is broken down, there is reconciliation, there is justice. Come and listen, then go and act, Isaiah is saying.

"The Lord will teach us His ways so that we may walk in His paths." Here is God's amazing plan, the one that He is bringing to fulfilment whether we are on His side or not. Are you in?

