

Sermon 5 Sept, Trinity 14, Isaiah 35: 4-7a, James 2:1-10, 14-17, Mark 7:24-end.

I find the words of Isaiah very uplifting.

*"Say to those who are of a fearful heart,  
'Be strong, do not fear!  
Here is your God."*

Words relevant to Isaiah's situation but also to us today with the Climate Crisis and with the outworkings of COVID19: Let's look towards God, look towards Jesus; Isaiah is surely pointing to the coming Messiah, to Jesus:

Isaiah says "He will come and save you"= Jesus means Saviour- Mary and Joseph weren't allowed to choose the name of the child she was to bear - the angel told her he was to be called Jesus.....

He will come and save you , -look at what the God who saves will do:

*"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.....and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy."*

And look at what Jesus does in the second part of our Gospel reading: he opens the ears of the deaf man and releases his tongue so he can speak; having already healed many many people.

But that's not all that this saving God will do: the following verses in Isaiah exclaim about the new life given to other parts of creation, not humans- he will come to save those too:

"Waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert" (an earlier verse says the desert shall rejoice and blossom). More proof then that Jesus came to save ALL creation, not just humans.

God's salvation plan started with His chosen people , the Jews (Israelites) because that's what you do don't you? Start with a core group and work outwards . Not everyone in those days got to know something at the same time -

maybe today that would work - I wonder how that would have been- God sending a message on all forms of social media for people to receive at the same time "This is Jesus, my Son, I am sending to you. Repent and He will save you"

And Jesus true enough spends most of his ministry trying to open the eyes and unstop the ears of the disbelieving Jews -

But Jesus is there for everyone - yes he came to the Jews first , but many were stubborn - Jesus wasn't the Messiah they were expecting : a military man to overthrow the Romans by force : therefore they remained deaf and blind to the truth about Jesus- Jesus who was God's son, Jesus who had come to save their people, not through force but through love.

But *some* people believed in Jesus and wanted to receive his healing - some of them were Gentiles- non-Jews -both the people in today's gospel were.

Jesus was inclusive - he healed the Syrophonician woman's daughter because the woman was so determined to ask to be included in the healing Jesus was offering - Inclusive Jesus , demonstrating God's love showing no partiality if there is commitment and trust, responded with love and compassion and healed her daughter.

Anyone can come to Jesus and be accepted if they want the new life Jesus offers.

So approach Jesus day by day, believe in his power to change situations, let your faith in him come alive in you-, let Jesus transform you - let your eyes become open, your ears unstopped and respond to Jesus' call to you to live your faith- feel the transformation, peace and energy as you live with God's

values, playing your part in the world. - this is surely what James means when he says faith *with no* works is dead implying that faith *with* works is alive.

Many writers think the James writing this letter was the younger brother of Jesus, not one of the 2 disciples called James, and suggests that Jesus's family didn't really understand what he was about until after the resurrection. Sometimes it seems we are too close to see , or too worried or scared to accept a change in the person we thought we knew or to take on board the change Jesus is asking us to make to come closer to him. It takes courage and time to be more active in our faith in whatever way God is calling us. But whatever that call is, it is easier to find out when feeling supported by other Christians, inspired to find out more, hearing about their experiences of Christ in their lives, coming to church to worship, to pray and to hear God's word together.

Putting Jesus central in our lives and seeking to follow him will lead to doing things that are pleasing to God. What James is stressing is that if we just say the right words but never do the actions , our faith is dead. God's unbounded love for us comes first - the unconditional love that we as humans find it hard to comprehend when usually we have our own agendas for our actions- we want to be successful, we want nice food and drink, we want a great holiday and material possessions- so we save up our money, or use credit to do things to make ourselves happy(we think) but this happiness is usually short-lived, we don't feel totally fulfilled, we know our actions don't quite live up to our words of faith.

But when we let God come close, when we feel Jesus' love and his sacrifice for us, his Holy Spirit moves us to act, we don't just sit there or carry on as before, our faith takes over and moves us to "works" - we help one another, give time or money to benefit others, make a difference to God's world - people made in His image and to other parts of His creation, which we are destroying or letting others destroy seemingly at will at the moment.

Look what we got in the post this week: It is our church's certificate for twinning our toilet with a latrine in a poor part of Nigeria- this is faith showing works - this is our church showing our faith is not dead- we recognise and are led to help those less fortunate than ourselves. We are not doing it to earn points to get to heaven, we are doing it because we care about our fellow human beings, we feel called by Christ to act for the marginalised .Part of our faith impels us to be generous to others here and abroad.

Great Britain is doing extremely well at the Paralympics - that is wonderful because it shows Britain is trying to give opportunities to disabled people - to value them for what they can do, what they aspire to be , using the gifts God has given each one uniquely- rather than treat them as second class and of little value. Sport is a huge opportunity to show inclusion but is bringing to light some huge problems in society of racism, homophobia and nationalism. Surely as Christians we are called upon to stand up for treating all people with dignity and respect and do what we can through God's love to transform attitudes and communities, and show the compassion and inclusion Jesus modelled.

"Be strong , do not fear! Here is your God."

Here is Jesus.

Have faith.

Turn to him and live!

Amen.

Katrina Nice, 5 Sept 21