

SERMON

The background is very important to understand the tone and intention of our reading.

The people of God, Israel are in exile in a foreign land Babylon. They are angry, feeling hopeless and frustrated. It feels like God is not bothered about them, that he does not care what will happen to them. They experienced their exile as a sign of God's inability to change their situation for the better. They thought to themselves, Maybe God got tired of them, maybe He lost His power, maybe the gods of Babylon are stronger, even mightier than the God of Israel!

Now the prophet Isaiah is comforting them. He reveals that God says that He is the Almighty God. He is still in charge. They must just take His hand and believe that He is with them always. He is always there to help and support them. They can come to Him. He will wipe away all their tears. He will deliver them. Those who rely on Him and trust in His Almighty power will be given the strength to overcome whatever they are facing, whether they are tired, ill, bereaved or anxious. When they build their hope in God "they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

It is quite meaningful that the people of God are addressed as Jacob and Israel. The origin of these words lies in the covenant that was formed between God and His people. They are reminded of the fact that in the covenant agreement that God has always been faithful while they were unfaithful.

When bad and tragic things happen to us and with us, with our families, to people living in our communities, we tend to also think like the people of God did a long time ago. We immediately think that God has no control over illnesses, freak accidents and tragedies. We also feel then that God has deserted us, that He lost control.

I think this was especially true of many people after hearing the sad news of Jak Trueman's death last Monday.

He was a local 15 year old pupil who attended West Calder High School. He played the tuba at Nanda's induction.

He was a healthy boy, keen musician and enthusiastic football player until last August when he was diagnosed with a very rare form of cancer – gammadelta T-cell lymphoma. Once they figured out what was wrong with him, they started treatment right away, and although he initially responded well to the treatment and was scheduled to receive a bone-marrow transplant two weeks ago. But then when the doctors run some tests, it revealed that the cancer has spread to his organs and bones and that there was nothing more they could do for him.

So he went home to spend as much quality time as possible with his family and the people he loves. He decided to make the most of his remaining time on earth. He started doing the things that he's always dreamt about doing. He also started raising funds for lymphoma and leukaemia research, so other people can be spared the pain he's been through. His dream was to fundraise so that a "safe place" for all children undergoing treatment can be erected. He called it "Jak's Den", which will be a purpose built building incorporating the following all requested by Jak last week:

- counselling/quiet rooms and fully qualified counsellors for siblings/ families and any other child/ teen requiring counselling
- a loud room for anyone wanting to go in and make as much noise as possible
- halls for Star Harmonies for singing, dance and drama lessons, as this was his family business
- halls will also be used for sports parties and indoor kids football

- a café for cancer sufferers and neutropenic folks who can't eat out in public for fear of infection - which will be sterile and all freshly cooked food
- an outdoor area with space for sports and games
- a music sensory area
- and a quad bike area

Despite his pain and discomfort, he was thinking about others and started a legacy which I am sure will be realised in the near future.

He did not waste his remaining time on earth feeling sorry for himself. No, as a believer, he knew where his strength and hope were. He could attest to the words of Isaiah 40. And because of his faith, he could see beyond this earth. Because of his hope, he could still dream.

A theologian once said: It is nonsense to ask the "Why God" questions because there are no answers. Instead we need to ask ourselves: but what can we do for others that are suffering, how can we help others to live a meaningful life despite their pain and suffering.

Jak did exactly this. He started his own charity to change the lives of many sufferers for the better.

You and I can do our bit too. Instead of asking why, instead of moping, we can use our energy wisely and positively by realising Jak's dream.

So let us read Isaiah 40 again when we feel as if God has deserted us/left us on our own. Let us be reminded how "deflated" the people of God felt in their circumstances. But let's be reminded again that God said He is still in control. He is the Almighty God who knows our suffering. He knows when we are down. He knows when we worry. He knows of that one appointment at the doctor which we dread. He can see when we fall apart. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He also knows when our faith is low and our hopes are down. But is then

in His mercy that He grabs us – touches us and gives us new strength.

May we find strength once again in the words of the prophet Isaiah. May we never doubt the Almighty power of God and may we always be aware of His grace, love and mercy. And whenever God makes us fly like eagles, let us be thankful!

And let us as a congregation pray for his mother Alison, and Jak's whole family, his girlfriend, Hannah and all his friends when they have to release Jak finally into God's care and keeping on Tuesday. Let us ask God to accompany them in their journey of bereavement! Let us plead with God to show them His way forward.

Amen.