

Let us worship God by our:

Call to worship

Minister: By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.

**All: There on the poplars we hung our harps,
for there our captors asked us for
songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy.**

MP 544 Open my eyes that I may see

Opening prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Let us pray:

Heavenly father, we are your humble servants,
We come before you today in need of hope.
There are times when we feel helpless,
There are times when we feel weak.
We pray for hope.
We need hope for a better future.
We need hope for a better life.
We need hope for love and kindness.
Some say that the sky is at it's darkest just before the light.
We pray that this is true, for all seems dark.
We need your light, Lord, in every way.
We pray to be filled with your light from head to toe. To bask in your glory.
To know that all is right in the world,
as you have planned, and as you want it to be.
Help us to walk in your light, and live our lives in faith and glory.
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.

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Isaiah 43:14-21 (OT page 729) &
Hebrews 11:1,30-34 (NT page 1209-1210)
Reader: Margaret Peden

MP 515 O Love that wilt not let me go

Sermon

The text for the sermon is verse 19: “¹⁹ Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.”

The book of Isaiah portrays a very dark chapter in the history of God’s people. They did not listen to the numerous warnings of God through His prophets and priests. And so in 587 BC the city of Jerusalem fell under the might of the Babylonian or Chaldean empire. They totally destroyed the city and the temple. Those who were not killed, were exiled to this foreign land. And in Psalm 137 we get a picture of their dire circumstances especially when they thought about the good old days in Jerusalem, going to the temple on the hill called Zion. But I guess soon enough as the younger generation grew up, they all just got used to it - never thinking for a moment that their exile can ever end. I mean we are talking of the mighty Babylonian empire. We see how the prophet has to remind them again and again that they must not desert God. God is still with them and He will make things better. A lot of them started to worship other gods.

It seems as if the people has forgotten about God and what He can do. They forgot that He is the creator of heaven and earth. I think the all just settled into Babylonian life. I am sure they started to listen to Babylonian music, dressed in Babylonian clothes, shopped with the Babylonians, and were exposed to the gods of the Babylonian people. It is evident from Isaiah itself that they became very comfortable living in Babylonia. I was not a place of exile anymore, but to some their home country – especially those who were born in exile. Their songs of lament without Zion faded in the joys of being a good Babylonian citizen.

But now the prophet says that God will make an end to the Babylonian empire. He will destroy their military might and bring his people out of exile. He will

forgive them for what they have done in the past and do a new thing. He will make a stream in the desert referring to His miraculous intervention in an almost impossible situation.

I am sure that the Israelites could not believe what they heard. To them it was totally unrealistic. I am sure they did not know the Almighty God well enough to have the living hope that He indeed can work miracles.

In the New Testament in the letter to the Hebrews, in chapter 11 this theme are taken further especially in verse 1 which says: "Now faith is being sure what we hope for and certain of what we do not see".

The writer goes on then listing all the instances and situations where the impossible did happen through the miraculous and Almighty deeds of God like the walls of Jericho, the conversion of a prostitute Rahab and other stories. He concludes saying that "faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, who shut the mouths of lions, whose weakness was turned into strength".

God did indeed started a stream in the desert through the coming of Jesus Christ to the world. Through Him and through His Holy Spirit living water is flowing through all the wastelands. To have faith in Him, to believe that He saved humanity from sin, death and hell, to believe in His resurrection and ascension, makes us people who drink from this living water. And this living water will flow through you and me until it reaches those who are thirsty and heavy laden, change the injustices that remains like discrimination and hatred, changes the dire circumstances of people that is spiritually starving, until all shall see God face to face. We have received living water from God, faith that can indeed move mountains, topple kingdoms and destroy evil.

Marc Kenton the other minister with South African connections told the following story in a recent sermon:

"During the height of apartheid, a political rally was cancelled by the white government, so the Archbishop Desmond Tutu of Cape Town invited the activists for a worship service instead, inside St. George's Cathedral. The power of apartheid was frighteningly evident in the numbers of riot police & armed soldiers massing outside the church. Inside, all along the cathedral walls, stood the fearsome Bureau of State Security police openly taping & writing down every

comment made from the pulpit. When Desmond Tutu rose to speak, the atmosphere was tense indeed. He confidently proclaimed that the 'evil' and 'oppression' of the system of apartheid 'cannot prevail'.

But then, as an observer wrote, "I sat in the cathedral congregation & watched Archbishop Tutu point his finger right at the police who were recording his words. "You may be powerful indeed, very powerful, but you are not God!"

And the God whom we serve, said Tutu, "cannot be mocked!" "You have already lost!" the diminutive preacher thundered. Then he came out from behind the pulpit & and his tone seemed to soften, flashing that signature Desmond Tutu smile and so he shouted with glee, "We are inviting you to come & join the winning side!"

At that moment, the South African archbishop was probably one of the few people on the planet who actually believed that apartheid would ever end!

And in the same sense, when you visit any museum on this earth depicting the history of the second world war, it seems evident that a lot of people thought it may never end, especially those on the receiving end of Hitler's termination to wipe out the Jews, the people from the travel communities, the Gay people, the children and adults with disabilities and those who were mentally unwell.

And in our daily lives, we encounter many dire situations like exile, apartheid and the death camps, where we are also thinking that it will never end.

But it did and does end. God is always doing a new thing, always miraculously intervening, always letting new streams of water flow, turning wastelands into beautiful gardens, deserts into flowerbeds by ways of speaking.

You and I are the ponds and the pipes taking the living water to those who are thirsty. And if we look around us, only when we focus intently on what we see, we will see the desert and the wasteland around us.

Is it because we are too focussed on the rest of the world and its problems that we lost track on what is going on under our noses? Is it because it is easier in the

rest of the world because people are there actually crying out for help, while here everyone thinks everything is hunky dory?

But is it really all well and hunky dory? While we know of the increase in numbers with people with dementia under the age of 60 because of drug and alcohol abuse? Is it all well when we hear frequently on the radio that there is a shortage of foster parents? Is it really all well, when only a hand full of children from our whole primary school in Kirknewton and East Calder actually come to church? Is it all well when people do not read their Bibles? Is it all well that a lot of people is misusing the name of the Lord?

As Christians in Scotland we stand at a cross road, we can either go overseas and spend time rescuing others or we can make a U turn back into our own villages, into our schools, into our uniformed organizations, into our homes, into our marriages and relationships, into the homes of our friends and neighbours, seeing and understanding the REAL spiritual needs and hopelessness of our own people.

The time is now for us as believers to start sharing the living water that we received from God. We must again start watering ourselves by reading the Bible and praying, watering others by ways of allowing God's peace, love, joy, faith and hope flow through us – spreading through the desert and setting all the captives free, Spiritually nurturing those who are thirsty!

May God help us that we do not become like those who were exiled a long time ago, not realising the wasteland around them. May we see the well of God's living water that springs up, all the opportunities, and all the situations that we can use to the advancement of God's Kingdom on this earth.

God will bring the whole Scottish nation to faith again. He will make the people in Kirknewton and East Calder drink from the living water once again. And if you are sitting in this church this morning and you are thinking: not a chance? You have not listened. God is not finished with Scotland, He is not finished with you and me, He is not finished with our church, He is not finished with the people living in and around Kirknewton and East Calder - doing miraculous things in us and around us!

Amen

Responding to God's word

Our offerings are given for the ministry and mission of the church while we sing
MP 200:1 & 3“Great is Thy faithfulness”.

Prayer of thanksgiving: Dora Bennett

MP 664 The Spirit lives to set us free

Benediction Receive the blessing of God and go in peace:

Let us take to heart the words of the Lord:

See, I am doing a new thing!

Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

**And The blessing of God Almighty, Father Son and Holy Spirit will be with you
all, now and for evermore.**

Sung Amen