

We're in the lead-up to Christmas, and even at His birth, Jesus is very much aligned with the lowly of this world. No vacancy/accommodation available for Him. And so, we have a freshly born baby, wrapped up in cloths and laid to sleep in a feed trough...

He is the King of Kings, but for Him, there was:

- no royal palace;
- no special comforts;
- no deep respect from those of high position and authority...

(at least not from within his own land)

And throughout history, Disciples of Jesus have come from all levels of society. And together, as the People of God, no one is greater than the other. In Christ, the high and lofty are brought down, and the lowly are lifted up.

The Apostle Paul said to the church in Corinth:

¹ Corinthians 1: (ESV) ²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were:

- wise according to worldly standards;
- powerful,;
- of noble birth.

²⁷ But God chose:

- what is foolish in the world to shame the wise;
- what is weak in the world to shame the strong;
- what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not,

to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

And so, if you feel that you are nobody special, that's OK. None of us are. We are not special, but we are called, by a Saviour Who is....

Our Bible readings today (Isaiah 35 & Psalm 146) foretell the coming of the Messiah. And in this foretelling, they proclaim something which has proven to be true: There is a very good reason why the Messiah was especially welcomed by the suffering; the broken; and the oppressed...

Isaiah proclaims:

- The eyes of the blind shall be opened;
- the ears of the deaf, unstopped;
- the lame man will leap like a deer;
- the tongue of the mute, will sing with joy;

And the Psalmist says:

- He executes justice for the oppressed;
- gives food to the hungry;
- sets prisoners free;

- The Lord opens the eyes of the blind;
- Lifts up those who are bowed down;
- He watches over the sojourner;
- He upholds the widow and the fatherless....

Alright, all of this is **exceedingly** good news,, especially for:

- the poor;
- the disabled;
- sick;

- those who have no power to stand up for themselves when they are mistreated...
- Lonely;
- bereaved;
- destitute;

And when Jesus the Messiah did come, there was no rest for Him, because the crowds would bring the sick/deaf/lame/dying, for Him to heal...

No wonder he was loved,, but for how long???

Even John the Baptist had his doubts. He wanted to know, "Jesus, are You the One?"

And so he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one we've been looking for? Or should we keep looking?"

And Jesus said to them, "You go back and tell John what you've seen and heard."

Luke 7: (ESV) 22:

- the blind receive their sight,
- the lame walk,
- lepers are cleansed, and
- the deaf hear,
- the dead are raised up,
- the poor have good news preached to them.

²³ And

- blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

All of the things that were foretold about the Messiah, Jesus was doing... No wonder He attracted the crowds... But hang on a minute... Where were the crowds when Jesus was crucified? Well, the crowds were there too, and most of them were shaking their fist, shouting out “Crucify Him!!!”...

You see, Jesus said “**blessed is the one who is not offended by me.**” but ultimately, despite His Goodness/healings/compassion,,, most **were** offended. Jesus the Messiah – the cornerstone of God, became a stumbling block – a rock of offence, on which many would stumble...

So, the coming of Jesus, **is** good news for the suffering and the broken and the oppressed...

And sadly, for many, it takes a time of utter desperation to get us to turn to Jesus... But even then, many will completely miss the true nature **of** the blessing...

You see, we humans, we tend to fixate on current earthly blessings, and when we do that, we completely miss what’s important – the blessing of the **eternal** Kingdom of the Messiah. And some become very discouraged, because for years they’ve been praying in faith, believing **for**:

- a miracle;
- a healing;
- the depression to be gone;
- their bills will be paid...

And they see others receive their miracles, but not them. They feel empty and unsatisfied...

The thing is: to understand the Kingdom of God, requires a radical change in our mindset – to shift from our short-term Earthly mindset, and to begin to live in terms of the **Eternal** Kingdom of Christ. And that's a matter of faith...

You see, it's not about "believing for" something. It's about "believing in" someone.

The miracles of Jesus (including the miracles that continue to happen today) is the Kingdom of God breaking into this world, now... But we're only catching glimpses of the Kingdom. Not all are healed. And even those who **are** healed, one day, will die.

And just like last week in Isaiah 11, we talked about how today we get little glimpses of the Kingdom of God, but when Jesus returns, **this** will be Messiah coming in all of the fulness of His Kingdom. This is going to be the time when the Lion **does** lay down with the lamb...

And we need to understand that today's readings are looking forward to the same time. When Jesus returns:

- the dead will be raised;
- the wicked will be judged;
- the righteous will inherit the Earth;
- We will receive a new eternal resurrection body.

This is when there will be:

- no more blindness;
- no more deafness;

- no more brokenness of bodies, that have become too old or too broken to function;
- no more pain;
- no more evil;

- no more poverty;
- no more injustice;
- no more grief or sorrow, to weigh us down.

So, having said that, today we're going to consider 2 simple questions:

1. What does the coming return of Jesus (the coming of Messiah) mean for us?
2. How do we as the church do what Jesus did? (Preach the good news to the poor, suffering, broken and oppressed)

So, let's consider the first question:

1. What does the coming return of Jesus (the coming of Messiah) mean for us?

Well, what it means, is we live by faith. And because our faith is in Him, and we know that He's going to return, we express our faith with joy; and hope; and confidence in our Lord.

You see, when Jesus preached, He said:

Luke 6: (ESV) 20 "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

²² "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven;

It's not about today. It's about what is to come.

Because our faith is in Jesus Christ – **because** we are confident that He **will** return, we are filled with hope and joy (today), even if we are going through some of the most horrible times... because we're not living for today. We're living for the Kingdom that is ours – the eternal Kingdom of God that is to come.

And for faith to be genuine, it needs to be put into action.

Isaiah commands it:

³ Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴ Say to those who have an anxious heart,
"Be strong; fear not!"

You know, when you hit that deep pit of despair, and you just feel like giving up,,,, and in that deep, dark, lonely, miserable place, Satan begins to whisper, *“You can make the pain stop; Your life is too painful – it would be better for you to end it... Then you’ll have peace...”* No you won’t. Do not listen to the Evil One. To give up – to end everything, is the words of faithlessness...

But for Disciples of Jesus, we have a different story. We have a story of faith. We have our hearts set on something far greater, that is to come.

And so, we:

- strengthen our weak hands;
- make firm our feeble knees;
- When our hearts are filled with anxiety, we are reminded, **“Be strong! Do not fear!”**

Why? Because our God is coming.

Look: (he says)

He will come

with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you.”

- ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

.....

Are you downcast? Are you filled with gloom and foreboding??? Where’s your faith? Don’t put your faith in today. Your faith is in Jesus.

I heard of somebody who was once asked, “How are you going?”

And instead of giving the normal replay “Alright, under the circumstances.”

*They said “Filled with joy, **over** the circumstances”.*

In faith, don't be downcast – don't give up – Fix your eyes on Jesus, and on the day of blessing when He returns... And that should fill our hearts with praise.

You see, genuine faith in Jesus and His coming, always leads to praise.

Psalm 146 began with the words:

146 Praise YHWH !

Praise YHWH, O my soul!

² I will praise YHWH as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

In other words, “While I'm still alive, no matter what my circumstances, I will praise God.

And then he ends the Psalm with praise:

Praise YHWH !

Psalm 146 is a song about putting our trust and hope, in the right place.

It's pointless to go looking for salvation from a ruler, hoping that they might give us justice... Princes; Prime Ministers; and Premiers have a habit of letting us down. In them, there is no salvation. They are but men & women. They too will die. Their plans and visions will not last...

In Faith, we turn to God. And not just any old god.

Ps146 makes it very clear, Who this God is. He is the God of Jacob. And it constantly uses God's personal Name YHWH. You'll see on the Bible Reading up there, The LORD (in all capitals). Wherever the LORD is written in all capitals, the word behind it in the Hebrew, is God's personal Name YHWH.

V5

- ⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in YHWH his God,
⁶ who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them,
who keeps faith forever;
⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry.
YHWH sets the prisoners free;
⁸ YHWH opens the eyes of the blind.
YHWH lifts up those who are bowed down;
YHWH loves the righteous.
⁹ YHWH watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,

but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰ YHWH will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, to all generations.
Praise YHWH !

We are left with no doubt, in whom we should trust.

So,

1. What does the coming return of Jesus (the coming of Messiah) mean for us?

It means a life of:

- hope;
- Joy;
- It's a call to faith – a faith that will fix our eyes on the prize, as we endure the hardships of today; and
- To be filled with Praise;

The 2nd question:

2. How do we as the church do what Jesus did? (Preach the good news to the poor, suffering, broken and oppressed)

It's an interesting question, because when we look at the churches in St George, most of the people who regularly attend, would be from working-class to middle-class... And very few would be the poorest or the most desperate and broken...

And often, church ministries to the poor and broken focus on providing social aid. Maybe:

- food hampers;
- counselling;
- health care of various types

And that's good – the Lord commands us to love and care for the poor...

But what we tend to do, is to remove what's most important – that is: the personal engagement and interaction – it's to share in the lives of the poor and broken and hurting. And so, instead of personally sharing their moment of pain, and walking with them through it, we turn it into a program and hand it over to a professional...

Maybe we need to be reminded that Jesus took his Disciples to the lowest of the low, and there the Gospel was proclaimed, and lived-out.

Now, while it's important to help provide immediate physical needs, that in itself, is NOT the Good News for the poor; suffering; broken; and oppressed.

The Good News that they need to hear, is the same Gospel that you and I need to hear. It is to have faith in YHWH. It is the good news that our God is coming, and He is coming to save His own.

Isaiah calls this, “The Way of Holiness”.

V8:

⁸ And a highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;

the unclean shall not pass over it.

It shall belong to those who walk on the way;
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.

You know, some folk who think of themselves as being “better than everybody else” reckon that to become a Christian, you’ve gotta leave your brains at the door.... But then those who see themselves as “the lowly” may feel that they’re not smart/educated enough to be a Christian... And shame on us if we’ve ever made anyone feel that way...

But the “Way of Holiness” has nothing to do with “smarts”. It is to do with faith – active faith. It’s not just about “believing”. It’s about “walking” along with what we believe. V8 says: **It shall belong to those who walk on the way;**

And not everyone gets to walk this “Way of Holiness”. It also says:

the unclean shall not pass over it.

And it goes on to say

the redeemed shall walk there

And the Ransomed of the Lord – they’re the ones who are brought in.

You see, the blessing is not a matter of:

- the poor getting it good; and the rich getting it hard.
- the sick being well; and the healthy beginning to suffer.

- those who have been treated harshly, finally getting their justice,
while everyone else cops it...

At the coming of Jesus, the blessings of the Kingdom, are for **all** God's faithful children. The "Way of Holiness" is only for the clean. It is for those who receive Jesus as their Lord and have their sins taken away.

It is for the redeemed – it is for those whom He bought back.

Jesus died on the cross, to redeem us – to buy us back. To travel the Way of Holiness, is to surrender our lives to Jesus, and receive Him as Lord and Master.

And then we follow Him, walking on the Way of Holiness, eagerly awaiting His return.

Let's pray:

Lord, we thank you,
for the blessing it is,
to be "the redeemed".

Lord, help us to walk the "Way of Holiness".
Fill us with joy we pray.
Even in our darkest, most painful days,
give us a joy,

as we eagerly await Your glorious coming.

We long for the day when all:

- sickness,
- suffering,
- injustice
- grieving

will be gone.

Lord,
fill our hearts with praise,
and help us to proclaim the good news
to all people,
from every strata and class of society.

In the Name of Jesus,
Praise YHWH
Amen.