

Isaiah 52:1-10

Church on the Corner

1 Awake, awake,
put on your strength, O Zion!
Put on your beautiful garments,
O Jerusalem, the holy city;
for the uncircumcised and the unclean
shall enter you no more.

2 Shake yourself from the dust, rise up,
O captive Jerusalem;
loose the bonds from your neck,
O captive daughter Zion!

3 For thus says the Lord: You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money. 4 For thus says the Lord God: Long ago, my people went down into Egypt to reside there as aliens; the Assyrian, too, has oppressed them without cause. 5 Now therefore, what am I doing here, says the Lord, seeing that my people are taken away without cause? Their rulers howl, says the Lord, and continually, all day long, my name is despised. 6 Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore on that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here am I.

7 How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'

8 Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,
together they sing for joy;
for in plain sight they see
the return of the Lord to Zion.

9 Break forth together into singing,
you ruins of Jerusalem;
for the Lord has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.

10 The Lord has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations;
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.

Introduction

Perhaps the defining films of the 1980's was Oliver Stone's 'Wall Street'. The villain is Gordon Gecko, a wall street trader, famous for lines like 'Lunch is for wimps', 'If you need a friend get a dog' and most famously 'Greed is good'. He has the money and the power, he is ruthless and heartless (as well as a relaxed attitude to insider trading) and it seems like he is in control of the world. And even after two global financial crises we still seem to be inhabiting that story. The Gordon Gecko's of this world are the powerful few, who get anything they want. They pull the strings and play the world like it is a game for their own ends. But we have tended to forget that Wall Street is a deeply moral story - and redemption is found in a Union Rep (played by Martin Sheen) who organises and ultimately unmasks their greed and their arrogance and they become the architects of their own downfall.

One of the big themes of the Isaiah is who is in charge?

We can easily fall for the myth that the powerful few are in control. It may seem that way. But don't despair. There is still justice in this world.

We are looking forward to the season of Advent

The season of beginnings. The start of the church year is not at the beginning of spring, but in the midst of winter. Because Christianity is hope in the darkness.

And God says to us - wake up.

v1 Awake, awake, cloth yourselves with strength!

Faith is not simply blind hope, it means that we see the world as it really is, the Kingdom of God is coming.

Context

In previous chapters God has spoken to the exiles in Babylon, but here Isaiah writes to those left behind. The poor, the elderly, the powerless inhabiting the the ruins of Jerusalem. They are downtrodden and overrun by the violent and ruthless Assyrian Empire "*the uncircumcised and the unclean*" who have desecrated the holy city.

You might well have some sympathy how they felt. Faced by a powerful figures that you can't stop. Your future is taken from you, you feel downtrodden and oppressed and are tempted to despair.

*v2 Shake yourself from the dust, rise up, O captive Jerusalem;
loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter Zion!"*

As they sat among the ruins, they were tempted to accept their fate. But God says to them rise up, dust yourselves off, cast off the chains that bind you.

What is the strength with which we are to clothe ourselves?

Because its is not what the world sees as strength. That is not real strength.

I think one of the dynamics in the Church is the fear of losing our place of privilege - our historical world power. That has been happening in Europe for the last century, it is happening in the US right now.

And when that happens church leaders are tempted to do whatever it takes to hold on to that power. But the right place for the church is not really the heart of power - it is the place of powerlessness, on the margins, siding with the voiceless.

As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians "*for Gods power is made perfect in our weakness*"

Ultimately the victory of God is seen in the Cross of Christ.

v3 For thus says the Lord: You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money.

The cross is the place of rejection and defeat but in the plan of God is is actually the place of triumph. On the cross he subverts worldly power - violence, fear, shame, even death. There God redeems humanity - which the world treats as worth nothing. But God redeems you back at the highest price. The price that God pays is not money but the his only Son. There we see the value he places on the lives of ordinary people. There he sets you free.

So What is your strength?

"Put on your beautiful garments" Clothe yourselves with the Righteousness Dignity, freedom, redemption that God gives.

Real strength is found in rooting and establishing ourselves in God's strength. Strength is found in faith, hope, truth and love.

So Hold on to that hope.

*v7 How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'*

Isaiah promised that one day someone will come, to the mountains of Judea and announce peace. One day a messenger will say to Jerusalem 'Your God Reigns' -He will announce the Kingdom of God is at hand.

And you are privileged to have seen that come true. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus goes about preaching the kingdom. "repent for the Kingdom of heaven is near." You have seen

*v10 "The Lord has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations;
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God."*

Because despite the way things sometimes seems 'Your God reigns.'

But remember that God's rule is not like the empires of the earth. It is a kingdom of peace. The way God exercises of that kingship is rather more gentle than earthly kingdoms. When his rule is rejected he doesn't act like a mediaeval tyrant - he often gives people what they ask for and allows greed and arrogance and selfishness to be the architects of their own downfall.

We might like God to be more direct. But historically God's plan is rather more subtle, rather more grassroots than that.

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world;
indeed, it's the only thing that ever has"* Margaret Mead

That exactly describes the early Church. A small group of faithful, prayerful citizens...

v8 The church is the watchman.

*Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,
together they sing for joy;
for in plain sight they see
the return of the Lord to Zion.*

That lovely picture of the sentinel standing on the city walls - looking out to the east - seeing the new dawn.

The point of a watchman is that they see things before others do, and sound the alarm. We Hold our society to account. Because we have seen that God is a God of Justice, and he is coming to judge the earth. We call our world to live in the light of the truth of God.

And we sing songs of Hope.

*v9 Break forth together into singing,
you ruins of Jerusalem;
for the Lord has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.*

We sing the songs that herald the dawn. Hope is the only thing stronger than fear. Hope is being able to see light despite all the darkness.

So wake up from sleep, clothe yourselves in the strength of God, cast off the chains that bind you and live in the light of hope.

Live as if it matters. Live consciously, day by day. This is the day that the Lord has made.

And Invest in the world that is coming

We build a new community with our brothers and sisters around the world a church which is a witness to the way of grace and love and generosity. And much of that building work looks quite ordinary. It isn't glamorous - it is getting your hands dirty.

And this is not just for the few.

*10 The Lord has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations;
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.*

This is good news for all who want it. We say all, both the rich and the poor, to the hopeless and the despairing, to the oppressed and the marginalised. There is a new dawn coming.

Conclusion

Wake up, see the world as it really is. Your God reigns
Wake up from despair - invest in the kingdom. Seek Justice.

And pray as Jesus taught us we pray your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is non heaven. And that pray shapes the people that we become.