

Friday 18th December

Pete Wildman

Readings

Psalm 30

Isaiah 54:1-10

1 John 4:7-8

Praise to the God who waits with us

Last year we decided to take up camping again, and had an experimental week in Shropshire. This year, in the gaps between lockdown, we were back in Shropshire again, this time with two of our grandchildren, aged eight and four. For the first outing of our new tent, we managed to choose a week when the country was visited by 80 mph gales. It was gusting as we erected it, and by midnight the full force was unleashed. I had parked the car in front of the tent and lashed them together, tied more guy ropes to a tree, and I spent the night lying awake, monitoring the progress of the storm on my Met Office app and wondering when everything was going to be torn from over our heads.

On reflection, it was a metaphor for this year: surrounded by a storm of disease, anxiously monitoring the news and the health apps to see the ebbs and flows of the tide of illness, wondering if we and those we love would be caught up. It also reminded me of these words in Isaiah: “lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes”. But Isaiah isn’t talking fearfully about an approaching storm – quite the contrary. He is prophesying the end of the storm, the end of barrenness and desolation for the people of Israel; “For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you,” he hears God saying.

You have to remember that the tents of nomads in Israel’s day were easily enlarged: you just lengthened the ropes and added some extra woven coverings to enclose a larger space. So in this part of Isaiah’s message, he is expressing hope in the character and promises of God. “For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.” Isaiah hears God using very personal language, speaking to Israel as a lover to a woman, and referencing some of the most painful experiences a woman can have. The inability to bear children; being widowed; being cast off by her husband. (Remember how much more poignant these images would have been in that culture even than today.) Israel had been forsaken by God, had been barren, taken into captivity – but those days were coming to an end. Israel would again be fruitful, and would experience the passionate love of her Maker, her husband, her redeemer.

It’s all part of the picture of Advent, of course – God’s promise of redemption and freedom. And it’s interesting that the story of the birth of Jesus contains so many women, and has the example of Elizabeth, whose barrenness was ended by the birth of John, the forerunner. I’m sure these things are not coincidences. No doubt this storm will pass, and we will be left counting the cost and reflecting on the lessons we have learned. As we approach the turn of the year, and the time of Christ’s birth, let’s remind ourselves of God’s everlasting commitment: “my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.” “Praise to the God who comes to bring comfort to all who mourn; the whole creation ‘glory’ sings as Christ the light is born.

Friday 18th

Praise to the God who clears the way
Preparing room and space;
For power and pride will lose their sway
As peace comes in their place.

Praise to the one who comes to judge
The truth of word and deed,
Who calls our minds and wills to change
Rebuking wealth and greed.

Praise to the God who waits with us
For hope and joy to reign,
Who shares our suffering and our loss,
Embodied in our pain.

Praise to the God who comes to bring
Comfort to all who mourn.
The whole creation "Glory" sings
As Christ the light is born.

Prayer

"Praise to the God who clears the way": may your Holy Spirit clear out the cellars and attics of our hearts, and make us clean for the coming of the King.

"Praise to the one who comes to judge": although it's not something we look forward to, we know that your judgment is just and compassionate, and that you plead the cause of all of us who need your grace.

"Praise to the God who waits with us": in this time of fearful hope and anxious expectation, be close to us and encourage us with your presence.

"Praise to the God who comes to bring comfort to all who mourn": for those of us who have seen friends and family pass from us this year, we pray for a special blessing at this time of Christmas, and that the coming of Christ to share our suffering will ease our heartaches.

We ask these things in the name of Jesus, the light of the world.

Praise to God who clears the way

<https://youtu.be/Yj-Cj8afpFM>

We pray for all who feel judged and ignored by others. We pray for our churches and our call to spread the gospel to all people



Wirral Methodist Churches
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