

Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018
You Will Go Out In Joy
Isaiah 55-60

Call to worship: Matthew 28:1-8

"The Sabbath day was now over. It was dawn on the first day of the week. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a powerful earthquake. An angel of the Lord came down from heaven. The angel went to the tomb. He rolled back the stone and sat on it. His body shone like lightning. His clothes were as white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

"The angel said to the women, 'Don't be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here! He has risen, just as he said he would! Come and see the place where he was lying. Go quickly! Tell his disciples, "He has risen from the dead. He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him." Now I have told you.' So the women hurried away from the tomb. They were afraid, but they were filled with joy. They ran to tell the disciples."

This is how Isaiah describes the coming of Jesus: light coming into the darkness. Painting of sunrise

The world does appear to be a dark place. Visit any news website, watch the news on TV, or read the newspaper, and you know there is darkness. Isaiah describes such a time through chapters 55-59:

- people lie rather than tell the truth
- are dishonest in business rather than fair,
- take advantage of the poor rather than treat people with justice,
- have no compassion for refugees/foreigners rather than help generously in love,
- look only to their own gain rather than looking out for all people,
- they say they are eager for God, but they do not follow His commands,
- they quarrel and fight, rather than living in peace and harmony
- they have no compassion for the hungry, but let them starve

In Jesus' day, the world was just as dark. In our world, it is much the same. As Isaiah puts it in Isaiah 59:9-10, *"We look for light, but we see nothing but darkness. We look for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. Like blind people we feel our way along the wall. We are like those who can't see."*

We love to complain about it! Isaiah 59:11: *"All of us growl like hungry bears. We*

sound like doves as we mourn. We want the Lord to do what is fair and save us. But he doesn't do it. We long for him to set us free. But the time for that seems far away."

There's a reason God seems so far away. Scripture tells us that our sin separates us from God. Isaiah writes (59:11-13): *"We want the Lord to do what is fair and save us. But he doesn't do it. We long for him to set us free That's because we've done so many things he considers wrong. Our sins prove that we are guilty. The wrong things we've done are always troubling us. We admit that we have sinned. We've refused to obey the Lord. We've made evil plans against him. We've turned our backs on our God. We've stirred up conflict and refused to follow him. We've told lies that came from our own minds."*

Jesus comes into our darkness, bringing light.

Isaiah 60:1-3

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."

Light comes as He takes all of our sin, all of our evil, all the darkness in the world upon Himself on the cross. As Jesus is crucified, He pays the price, He destroys the power of sin and death. As Paul puts it: *"Everyone has sinned. No one measures up to God's glory. Christ Jesus paid the price to set us free. God gave Christ as a sacrifice to pay for sins through the spilling of his blood. So God forgives the sins of those who have faith. We are made right with God by putting our faith in Jesus Christ. The free gift of God's grace makes us right with him ... He is a God of mercy"* (Romans 3:22-26).

Jesus, the light of the world, shines in the darkness; the darkness cannot overcome it.

We are saved by grace, into new life: Add foreground, streams, gardens – restoration of Eden

Isaiah 55:1-3

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live."

We are invited to life – new life – life as it was meant to be – through Jesus. This is God's gift of mercy and grace to us. We do not earn it, or deserve it.

Paul writes, *"You were living in your sins and lawless ways. But in fact you were dead. You used to live as sinners when you followed the ways of this world ... Our desires were controlled by sin. We tried to satisfy what they wanted us to do. We followed our desires and thoughts. God was angry with us like he was with everyone else. That's because of the kind of people we all were.*

"But God loves us deeply. He is full of mercy. So he gave us new life because of what Christ has done. He gave us life even when we were dead in sin. God's grace has saved you. God raised us up with Christ. He has seated us with him in his heavenly kingdom. That's because we belong to Christ Jesus. He has done it to show the riches of his grace for all time to come. His grace can't be compared with anything else. He has shown it by being kind to us.

"He was kind to us because of what Christ Jesus has done. God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn't come from anything you do. It is God's gift. It is not based on anything you have done. No one can brag about earning it" (Ephesians 2:1-9).

All are welcome! This is not a Jewish-only club, a Middle-Eastern only club, certainly not a white European only club. Everyone is welcome and valued. Isaiah 56:6-7:
*"To the foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants ... these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; **for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.**"*

Repentance and Purpose: painting of people in the garden – talk about confession and loving God and loving neighbour (justice).

Being an Easter people is more than just "believing the right things." Its more than just praying a prayer. Jesus is calling us to a new way of living.

Isaiah 55:6-7

"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."

Isaiah 56:1: *"Maintain justice and do what is right."*

Isaiah 58:6-9: *"This is the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke, to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—*

*when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear;
then the Righteous One will go before you,
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.
Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I."*

In a society that says you have to wear this, like this, and be popular, where bullying and judging happens online and in person, where people are judged because of how they look, where everyone wants to be perfect but they don't realise no one is perfect.

This is where we can offer comfort and reassurance: everyone is loved, and is of the same inherent value. It's not about perfect selfies and Instagram likes and exam grades and money and status. This is a message people need to hear.

One journalist writes, "In the past few decades, some parts of the church that tend to reject the trappings of religion have tried desperately to appear 'normal.' But for a generation that prizes authenticity, maybe that's just a turn-off. Rather than being just a slightly rubbish version of the rest of the world, with slightly rubbish coffee and slightly rubbish music, maybe it needs to embrace its difference, its strangeness, its weirdness, its mystery."¹

How can we be God's good news? After a long discourse about anything and everything to do with Jesus' resurrection and our resurrection, one day, some day, Paul concludes, *"Let us give thanks to God! He gives us the victory because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done. My dear brothers and sisters, remain strong in the faith. Don't let anything move you. Always give yourselves completely to the work of the Lord. Because you belong to the Lord, you know that your work is not worthless"* (1 Corinthians 15:57-58)

In Ephesians, after reminding us that we are saved by God's grace, Paul writes, *"We are God's creation. He created us to belong to Christ Jesus. Now we can do good works. Long ago God prepared these works for us to do"* (2:10).

Benediction: Isaiah 55:12-13

*"You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and hills will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field will clap their hands ...
This will bring glory to my Name. It will be a lasting reminder of what I can do.
It will stand forever."*

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/22/christianity-norm-underground-mystery>