

**SERVICE TRANSCRIPT**  
**Sunday July 26th 2020**

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*Speaker: Mark Reid*

From Psalm 136:

*Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good  
His love endures forever.  
Give thanks to the God of gods,  
Give thanks to the Lord of lords,  
To Him who alone does great wonders,  
Who by His understanding made the heavens,  
Who spread out the earth upon the waters,  
Who made the great lights –  
The sun to govern the day,  
The moon and stars to govern the night.  
To the one who remembered us in our low estate,  
and freed us from our enemies,  
And who gives food to every creature.  
Give thanks to the God of heaven  
His love endures for ever.*

Father we thank you that your love endures forever,  
that forever you are faithful,  
forever You are strong,  
that You are with us forever.  
There is nowhere we can go  
that will take us from your love and your care.  
Lord you are so good,  
and we praise your holy name.

Even though we know that God is good, that He is with us always – there are times when it is easy to forget. Some of us have been going through difficult times over these last months – maybe isolated, lonely, without friends or family, struggling with health and all sorts of concerns. Talking on the phone or even on ZOOM or something similar is not the same as being face to face physically, and certainly many of us have missed that hug we get from friends and family when we meet. And so it has not been easy to be thankful, especially when we have been in dark times.

BUT it is at times like that we HAVE to remember all that God has done for us – maybe we feel led to sing a song, or read a scripture verse; maybe we remember something that we have heard, in one of Mark's sermons, on radio or television or read in a book.

Over these last weeks, Mark has been guiding us through Isaiah 61 verses 1- 3 and then Luke 4 – and reminding us of the One who came to bring healing, forgiveness, freedom.....

Later this week, Malcolm and I will be celebrating our 44<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Those years have been years filled with joy, but there have also been some dark times – times of mourning, of sadness, of worry, of illness – but the constant throughout them has been the certainty that God was walking through it all with us, even when we didn't realise it at the time. He has guided our journey, shone a light in dark places, and healed our wounds. He has given us companions on the journey – wise friends and good families. And so we will celebrate and give thanks - and look to the future knowing that He will be with us, whatever it brings.

I wonder what you have to give thanks for today.

Life giving God,  
By your Spirit you brought creation out of chaos  
and gave life to the world.  
Now You sustain all things  
And still You give life to the lifeless.  
You have found us and changed us,  
Awoken and inspired us.  
You have given us new life in Jesus Christ;  
You have wooed us in love  
And created love within us.  
God our creator, redeemer and sustainer,  
We give You thanks and praise.  
AMEN

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Let's come before the Lord this morning with our intercessions. These are largely based on the items in the Weekly Sheet,

Father we continue to bring our country before you as we live with the constraints that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought us. We pray that the population will continue to support the measures being taken to control the disease and that new cases and deaths will continue to fall. Lord, have mercy on those who have lost jobs and struggling with debt. We continue to pray for progress in vaccines and treatments. We pray for those countries that are struggling with high infection and death rates, that you will give wisdom to their leaders to take measures to get the epidemic under control.

Lord, in your mercy  
*Hear our prayer*

We pray for Christian mission in Felixstowe in these exceptional days. We pray for Hope Trust as they restart ministry from Maidstone Hall next week, that you will help Paul and Sheila find the right level of service to begin with.

We pray for Boost as preparations are begun for next academic year under new school management and against the background of coronavirus. We pray for the continued growth of chaplaincy at what is now Felixstowe School.

We pray too that you will bless the video Fun and Faith have produced in lieu of the Carnival weekend, that it will reach many families in the town and beyond and good contacts will be made.

Lord, in your mercy  
*Hear our prayer*

Finally Father, we pray for our own fellowship, that you will guide us as we make preparations to re-open the building for worship and other activities. Help us to get the balance right between what we are doing now, and what we need to do as we re-open. We continue to pray for those isolated at home because of health issues and have no access to the internet. Please bless them richly. And help each one of us Father, to see possibilities instead of problems as we work through the changes that we are having to consider at the present time. May your Spirit work in us and through us to extend Your Kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy

*Hear our prayer*

For the sake of Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, who died, is risen and is now glorified

*Amen*

## Sermon

READING Isaiah 61:1-3

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,

2

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,

3

and provide for those who grieve in Zion—  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty  
instead of ashes,  
the oil of joy  
instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise  
instead of a spirit of despair.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the Lord  
for the display of his splendour.

## FROM GRIEF TO GLORY

We have been exploring these verses from Isaiah 61 where we read that the Anointed One, the Messiah will come – and in Jesus He has – to bring good news to the poor, bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners. His is a liberator, not just in a literal sense, but spiritually too.

In his reading of the prophecy in Nazareth, Jesus cut the passage short to make a very good point, which we explored last week. He wanted to stress that the year of God's favour was right there, right now. As I observed, it didn't mean that Jesus ignored the issue of the day of vengeance of God: He warned many times of God's coming judgement. Many commentators and preachers separate the two into time-frames of now and later – favour now, vengeance later.

But let me give you another take on the day of vengeance of our God that applies to Jesus in which the year of the Lord's favour and day of vengeance of our God were in the same time-frame.

CROSS

In Nazareth, Jesus proclaimed the year of the Lord's favour – God was announcing Jubilee on the human race for all who would follow Him. He was cancelling the debt of sin and freeing those who were captive to sin and blinded by it. How was God going to do that? He had to assuage His wrath and exercise His righteous judgement. The year of God's favour was an age Jesus ushered in, but God's vengeance was satisfied in one single day as God's wrath and judgement was meted out on His Son, on the righteous Servant of Isaiah chapters 40-55, and it's particularly described in chapter 53. Let's get a flavour of it: Isaiah 53:4-10 NIV

Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.  
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.  
He was oppressed and afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.  
By oppression and judgment he was taken away.  
Yet who of his generation protested?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living;  
for the transgression of my people he was punished.  
He was assigned a grave with the wicked,  
and with the rich in his death,  
though he had done no violence,  
nor was any deceit in his mouth.  
Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,  
and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin,  
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,  
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

And there we are – generations before it happened and in the same prophetic book: the death of the righteous Servant, the Messiah is described in graphic detail. And that was what happened to Jesus, the Messiah on that fateful day on Calvary.

As with other aspects of Isaiah in general and Isaiah 61 in particular, prophetic fulfilment is in more than one context and time-frame. The day of vengeance is past in regards to the cross but still to come in the future in regards to the final judgment of God on the human race. And fulfilment in the past, validates the future context in prophecies that have dualities of this kind. So we await the second coming of the Messiah and the coming judgement. In the meantime God's favour rests on all who will follow Jesus.

This year of favour and day of vengeance reminds me of Psalm 30:5 which says *For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favour lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.* We have a God who is righteous and just and is rightfully angry because of the sin and rebellion against Him, but his grace, love and mercy are in greater measures. His anger and

vengeance last a moment, a day, but his favour is a year or a lifetime by comparison. Today His favour rests on all those who allow Jesus the Messiah to liberate them.

If you are listening this morning and think that God can never forgive you and accept you for whatever reason, then understand, he is more than ready and willing to forgive you because of Calvary. Jesus faced the wrath of God for you in order that you may find forgiveness, and hope. Allow Him to come into your life today because He desires to bless you and walk with you through life and liberate you from all the things in life that damage you and break you.

And that brings us to the rest of verse 2 and verse 3 of Isaiah 61. The year of God's favour and day of vengeance open up to us the rest the Messiah is anointed and able to do.

In a previous week we saw how Jesus altered the intent of Isaiah 61:1 by announcing that the Messiah was to send out those wounded or oppressed in freedom to declare the year of the Lord's favour. We are not just liberated from whatever has imprisoned or broken us, the Messiah turns things right around and uses it to our benefit and His glory. Verses 2 and 3 of Isaiah 61, which Jesus didn't read in Nazareth also take us in that direction. The Messiah doesn't liberate and leave. He liberates to bless. He liberates to glorify God. That's why I've given the title of what I have to say this morning as FROM GRIEF TO GLORY. The Messiah is anointed

*to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour  
and the day of vengeance of our God  
to comfort all who mourn,  
and provide for those who grieve in Zion*

For the Jews who first read these words, their poverty, captivity and imprisonment led to intense mourning because of their loss, the destruction of the land, Jerusalem and the Temple. Their society and religion was in tatters. And they knew why – because of their sin and rejection of God's will and warnings. There was mourning amongst the captives and amongst those back in the ruin of the land. Theirs was a broken world, a broken society. God was going to reverse that. In one sense that was fulfilled in the return from exile and God blessing Judah in a new way.

Wind on down the centuries and we see how sin still leads to broken societies and broken people. Right now, so much of what is in our world is broken, in tatters – covid, unrest, economic slump, unemployment, uncertainty. Even for us a God's people in Britain, our society is regarded as post-Christian as there are so few of us as a proportion of the population. Then there are all the personal tragedies that sin and death brings us which we have also thought about in previous weeks. Our hearts as God's people can be just as broken by tragedy, family break-up, illness, accident, addiction, loss failure or whatever as anyone else. Such is the consequence of sin in our generation. Spiritually and literally, we can mourn and grieve for what could be but isn't.

Into this Jesus brings comfort for those who mourn and provides for those who grieve. The message of comfort for each man and woman grieving is :- God's favour is on you. Jesus died for you, He suffered God's vengeance for you. And Jesus wants to change you and bring you afresh into the presence of God. He uses three ways that those who worshipped God in the temple would have been familiar with.

He wants to crown us with beauty

*To bestow on them a crown of beauty, instead of ashes*

In many societies the loss of loved ones cause the family and friends to mourn with sackcloth and ashes. In Bible times people also clothed themselves with sackcloth and ashes when penitent and repentant after realising they had sinned before God (e.g. the citizens of Jerusalem when Ezra read the Law to them

(Nehemiah xxx). In many Christian communities today, the same acts of repentance occur commonly on Ash Wednesday and are elaborate in some parts of the world. VIDEO

When sin, or personal disaster hits us, we grieve don't we? We may not do what those people in the video do literally, but figuratively we are covered with dust and ash, miserable, broken. That's not how God actually wants to see us. He wants to clean the ash off our heads and replace it with a crown of beauty: a glorious head dress or garland. When the Jews came to worship God in the Temple; that's what they wore at times of worship and celebration to God.

Jesus can change our lives from the ashes of sadness and brokenness. A nineteenth century Scottish Minister, Hugh MacMillan wrote this: *To the sorrowful God gives beauty for ashes. Sorrow and suffering play a gracious part in the moral economy of the world. They are all the furnace in which our evil nature is reduced to ashes. We are laid with the great Sufferer of our race upon the altar and shame in the fellowship of His sufferings, and like Him are made perfect through suffering.*

MT TIEDE

In February we visited Tenerife, and went up Mt Tiede the huge volcano that dominates the island which last erupted in 1908. Near the top it's like the surface of Mars, but as you get further down the volcano, the grounds start to be characterised by vegetation and the soils on Tenerife are wonderfully fertile. From the fire and the ash of that volcano grows the lushest of vegetation in the subtropical part of the island and that's where the settlements are.

Jesus wants to change us into objects of spiritual beauty and he starts by changing our minds. The end of mourning and brokenness starts with our assent, a change of mind: repentance. We know we shouldn't be there. But Jesus can change all that ash into beauty when we recognise that He can and will, and come before Him and receive forgiveness and renewal. It's a decision of our mind to accept Jesus into our lives, and also to surrender our suffering and mourning to Him. He's the One who changes minds – He clears off the ashes and changes it for a crown of beauty, which reflects our status in Christ as part of God's family.

Never allow suffering and mourning to be a destroyer of your life, instead see it as God's opportunity to grow and flourish in you; a life that enriches you and enriches others. Come before Him this morning and find hope and freedom from whatever is holding you back; whatever does not allow you to move on.

He wants to fill us with joy

*The oil of joy instead of mourning,*

In the second picture, Jesus changes us a step deeper. Oil signifies two things in the Bible, firstly, Jews used perfumed oils lavishly when they celebrated and worshipped. It was the oil of joy. Jesus doesn't just rescue us from whatever we are mourning, but He changes our emotions; changes our hearts; changes what motivates us. God wants to bring joy into our lives as we realise what He has done for us. A new attitude, a new hope, a new meaning to life, a new passion can change how we deal with situations, even if the circumstances haven't changed! And what change should we be joyfully celebrating? The second use of oil was for what is known as unction. Anointing with oil was a mark of both consecration and healing. Jesus can and does transform us from that which we mourn and brings healing and gives us that amazing assurance that in Him, by grace we are special to God, we are loved. Anointing most of all means that we are appointed to do the work of the Anointed One – Jesus – and like that cosmetic oil we should shine for Him! Do you want to shine? Do you want to shine again? Trust Jesus to bring that change about in you – He's the Anointed One. That's what He does. Let Him do it in your life.

Finally He wants us to put on new clothes

*a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair*

We live in a society obsessed with clothes and appearance. I'm unfashionable. I like to be practical about clothing. Does it fit OK? Is it comfortable? Does it match the conditions outside? I may not be trendy, but I do wear a jumper when it's cold and shorts when it's hot. As we walk in life, how do we live? What

shapes our attitudes and actions? Jesus offers us a new coat – a garment of praise. In Jesus' day and earlier, those worshipping God often wore the appropriate garment – the Hebrew word suggests some sort of vestment. When we look good and feel good, it can make so much of a difference.

When we praise God, we start to think on the things in life that are truly important. The words we sing, the words we pray, the words we read in the Bible are all perspective changers. It takes our attention away from the here and now and allows us to embrace God's view of the world, to understand His will for us, His purposes in the days we have left and find His solutions to our current situations, and allows us to be content in Him. This is also what Hugh MacMillan says of this phrase:

*We cannot keep Jesus and sadness both with us, any more than the world can keep both sunshine and mists.*

When we praise God, perspective comes and we start to understand where the sadness should go. It's difficult isn't it not to be able to sing together at this present time, but remember that there are still plenty of ways we can praise and worship God; even listen to the music – actually, you may find with a different arrangement and having to listen it's possible to appreciate the words in a different way. Then there's the Bible, prayer, finding stuff to uplift us on the internet or whatever.

In one of the churches I was part of, we often found that people took "time out" when they were struggling spiritually. We never encouraged them to do that and I still wouldn't. Come and worship however you are, however you feel – and let God speak to you through worship because in putting on praise as a garment, God speaks deep into our souls. Allow Him to do that.

As we meditate on this today, there is much challenge here. Jesus comforts and provides for us in our deepest spiritual need, mourning or grief. He wants to change our minds, our hearts and our souls. No longer should we have a spirit of despair. He can free us from that and restore us to what we were, or take us to what we should be. Let's invite Him to make that change today.

#### CONFESSION

As we close, let's take a few moments in silence to allow us each time to recognise our weaknesses and to ask Jesus to crown us with beauty, bring back or increase the joy in us and open our hearts to praise Him that he may speak deep into our souls.

#### **Blessing**

Dear Lord,  
Today we give thanks for our many blessings  
As we pray for those in need.  
We give thanks for our family and friends  
As we pray for those who are lonely.  
We give thanks for our freedoms  
As we pray for those who are oppressed.  
We give thanks for our good health  
As we pray for those who are ill.  
We give thanks for our comfort and prosperity  
As we share our blessings with others.  
And may Your love enfold us,  
Your peace dwell within us,  
And Your joy uplift us.

AMEN