

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service/passage.

Week beginning Sunday 8 December 2019 Hold on to hope

Pray Thank God that we have cause for hope. Praise God that his hold on us is far stronger than our hold on him and that even through tough times we can be sure that he has our best interests at heart. Pray that we might be better at seeing where and how God is working and more ready to put his plans before our own wishes. Ask that we might be able to take a long term view to things and embrace a wider understanding of the extent of God's purposes.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Isaiah 11:1-10.

Background Isaiah offers a further pictorial view of how he sees God's plans for the future taking shape. He envisages a future king, (from the line of Jesse, David's father) who will rule with justice and fairness, not influenced by personal considerations nor swayed by hearsay, a ruler who would be closely aligned with God's purposes. And on top of that a picture of nature at peace with itself and with God.

Possible questions/points to consider

1. How do you react to the suggestion that Isaiah is using hyperbole (over the top language) to portray his vision of the future? Perhaps we have such a low expectation of our leaders that we find it hard to take in that God has in mind a perfectly honourable and just ruler? What do you think? Given that we have a general election this week what pointers might we have in the passage (not for where to place your cross) towards traits and qualities we might look for in potential leaders?
2. We find it hard to envisage lions and lambs lying down together but at a time of increasing concern about our relationship with the planet and when the UN is holding a hugely important conference on climate change what can we learn about God's intentions for the whole created order, our relationship with the planet? Is our view on climate change absolutely defining? If so, why? If not, then how does it tie in with other aspects of life?
3. I used the illustrations from my garden of severe pruning of roses and of the planting of a cutting in a decaying tree stump (which further disintegrated as it gave nourishment to the new). In slightly different ways new growth came. Coupled with the passage how might these help us to face up to radical change? How do they offer hope for the future (maybe not of the Church as we have known it but) of God's plans and purposes?
4. We all like to celebrate success and growth. How do we learn that sometimes growth comes at the expense of the decrease or even demise of things we have held dear? How do we learn to bring some things to a conclusion in a way that honours people and service? How do we learn to transition to the new? How do we judge what is good and healthy in the "new"?
5. Almost by definition hope has some uncertainty in it – at least, when it comes to specifics but biblical hope has a certainty about it largely unknown in other areas. Why is resting on the promises of God so important? How do we avoid the mistake of cutting ourselves off from earthly reality while claiming that our hope is in God? Jesus was very much all into the rough and tumble of people's lives as well as being very secure and committed to his Father's ways. What could we learn from this example?
6. Hope in God's future does not remove the stresses and strains of earthly living but it can give us an incentive to live life now more in keeping with God's plans and purposes. How do we keep a balance between being both worldly wise and heavenly minded? What practical steps might we take to begin allowing our hope for God's future to impact upon his and our present?

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the hope that you give us in Jesus. Help us to allow our hope for a positive future through Jesus to impact upon the way that we approach the challenges now and to convey at least in some measure something of the love, justice and peace that he came to bring into the world. Amen.