

12th May 2020

Dear Friends

In the sixth chapter of the book of Isaiah the prophet says 'In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord, seated on a throne, high and lifted up and the hem of his robe filled the temple.' Reading the words that follow it's easy to be absorbed by Isaiah's encounter with God who the angels surrounding the throne acclaim as holy and fail to notice the occasion of Isaiah's vision. It was the year King Uzziah died. This was a moment of national crisis. Judah was a small nation, vulnerable to the great powers that surrounded it, vulnerable to idolatry and injustice at home and the King who guaranteed their security had died. It's at this moment Isaiah sees the Lord on his throne. Isaiah is overcome by a sense of holy fear in the presence of God but cleansed of his sin he hears a voice saying 'Who will I send, who will for us?' Isaiah responded, 'here I am send me.'

Isaiah is the prophet of God's sovereignty, proclaiming that our God is King even when the nation was overwhelmed by crisis and danger. His voice is worth hearing. Our God is King. Sometimes we misunderstand this. It doesn't mean God is micro-managing our lives as if we were puppets on a string, he never denies us our freedom, God's sovereignty is dynamic, responsive and enduring. We can trust in him whatever the situation we are facing. The word of God came to Isaiah challenging him, 'who will go for me and who will I send?' If we are listening for the voice of God, then we will also be challenged to respond in obedience to his call, even when the situation we face is becoming a little confused.

The new message from our government is 'stay alert' instead of 'stay at home'. This places much more responsibility on us to be responsible for our own behaviour and follow the essential guidelines about washing our hands, watching for symptoms of the coronavirus and maintaining spatial distancing. Many of us will welcome the greater freedom to be out of doors, meet other members of our family out of doors and visit garden centres but there are many things in the Prime Minister's recent statement that require greater clarity and are still uncertain until we have an effective regime for testing and tracing. Of course, the situation is becoming increasingly complex as restrictions are relaxed. Politicians so used to speaking in a 'soundbite' culture may have lost the art of conveying complex things simply just as we may have lost the art of listening carefully. Let us pray both all who govern us that their policies, their delivery and their messaging address the real needs of our nation, especially the most vulnerable.

As I reflect on how we respond to the call of God I am mindful of a song inspired by the words of Isaiah.

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my words to them.
Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will send the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

Last Sunday we focussed on the words of Jesus 'I am the bread of life' and this song echoes that theme. 'Finest bread I will provide.' As we respond to the call of God with the words of Isaiah. 'Here I am Lord, send me' may we share the bread of life with our neighbours.

Some people have begun asking when we may be able to return to worship at New North Road. The short answer is we don't know. The earliest possible date is July, but it may not be until September. We will follow the best available advice and will not open the church buildings until the Baptist Union tells us we can do this. Please pray for our deacons, who are meeting via zoom next Tuesday, as they consider how we can do this safely.

I hope everyone is staying connected and in touch with other people. If you need to get in touch with me my mobile number is 07852490034 and my email is rmijanes@aol.com.

You may want to look at our new website too. www.nwenorthroad.org.uk. As you'll see, it says. 'We'll meet again.' I am looking forward to that day.

Your friend and pastor

Mark