

ISAIAH 40: 21 - 31**MARK 1: 29 - 39****HAVE YOU NOT KNOWN...?**

INTRODUCTION Sometimes life's a bugger! Things go wrong and usually polite people want to swear. Even a simple thing like the washing machine breaking down seems like a conspiracy. Life seems to be "one damned thing after another."

It's worse if we look at the world through our TV screens; it's the same old story of violence, corruption, tragedy and pain; meaningless war and destruction. We stare into another destroyed city or the eyes of another desperate child and want to cry out, "Why? Where is God? Does God care?"

Long ago an Israeli prophet faced just such a situation (without the TV of course). He was speaking to people who had lost pretty much everything that defined their lives—homes and land, family and identity, and even their faith. They had been taken captive in Jerusalem and carted off into exile in Babylon. Isaiah writes to these people who have lost everything....

read Isaiah 40: 21 - 26

Isaiah understands the complaint from the people that's ringing in his ears "**God pays no attention to us! He doesn't care if we are treated unjustly**" What's the use of a God who counts the stars but ignores justice for the people? So the prophet replies; **Have you not known? Have you not heard?** He goes on to say;

There is nothing in the world that does not owe its existence to God who, in their cosmology, sits above the circle of the earth - that is, over all space. This God is also the one who brings down princes - *ie* who moves through historical events - Creator of the universe and Lord of history. The prophet asks, "To whom can you compare God? Who is God's equal, who brings out the stars, calling them by name and ensures that not one is missing?" This is the God we deal with in our faith.

If you take every a cursory look at the world in which we live, there is much to shake one's faith in God. Don't be fooled into dismissing idols as outdated powers of the ancient past. You don't have to look far for evidence of the work of the modern idols of capitalism, nationalism, militarism and self-worship who produce their fruits of warfare, injustice, greed, cruelty, and oppression in the world in which we live. Their worshippers exist in multitudes. It would be easy for just about anybody to say with the captives in Babylon, "God pays no attention to us! He doesn't care if we are treated unjustly" (Isa. 40:27 *CEV*)!

The prophet's message is that even though God is the creator of the ends of the earth, God is not unmoved by the plight of human beings, nor unwilling to help those in trouble. Have you not known? Have you not heard? When all human

possibilities fail; when even the strongest get weary and even the young collapse exhausted, those who wait or, in other words, those who hope in God's purposes find their strength renewed; they will fly like eagles, run like cheetahs, walk and not faint.

Some of you might say, "That's fine in a sermon, but what does it mean in real life?" What do you say preacher, to the person locked in the darkness of depression; to the mother for whom there is neither food nor shelter for her children; to anyone for whom there seems to be no way out? To the family waiting in the ruins of their city for the next drone to drop its load of explosives on a huddled population?

These are difficult questions and I don't want to offer you religious clichés as an answer. But honestly, the answers of the Scriptures are no easier than the questions.

As a beginning, I want to turn to this week's gospel passage where we see the God of Isaiah in the divine humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. Mark presents Jesus in a variety of situations, without much connection between them. Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law; heals people at sundown; goes off to pray in the early morning; Mark spells out Jesus' teaching itinerary in Galilee. But what struck me most forcefully was the presence of Jesus in the domestic situation of Peter and Andrew's house where Peter's mother-in-law was ill. This is Jesus at home - Jesus as visitor where the lady of the house (and the provider of dinner) is too sick to cook a meal. Why does this mundane detail appear in the gospel story, and what does it have to say about us and Isaiah's situation?

It is included to show that Jesus, God in the flesh, is at home where we are at home. How strange and yet comforting for Mark to show the Son of God at home - where we live: where we get sick - and argue - and feel unappreciated - and face family decisions - and live the routines that are part of our ordinary life. The Son of God is there. The presence of the God of Isaiah is there. **He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.** In our home, where we are, that is where the God of Jesus wants to be and is to be found.

The God of Israel and the God of Jesus is right in the middle of our worldly mess. O we may wish for a different God. We would prefer a God who kept bad things from happening to us. A God who would change the human situation at the flick of God's divine finger. But that would be at the cost of our freedom. That would make God a tyrant, a Dictator of the ilk of our world's tyrants. That would be a deal with the devil.

The Christian God is not a Dictator. Instead, the God of the Bible promises to stand with us in all the situations human freedom wreaks upon the world. And let's be clear - the mess of the world is not God's doing - it is entirely ours. It is all the doing of human beings - our fault, our mess, tragedies of our making. God continues to be

with his creation and his creatures, creating new worlds out of total chaos, breathing life into what appears to be piles of dust, taking the wreckage of our lives and making something good out of them, sometimes in spite of us - because that is who God is and how God works.

Sometimes it is obvious and sometimes it is not. Sometimes the presence of God is so evident you can see it a mile away and other times you have to dust for fingerprints. Sometimes the voice of God comes straight from heaven and makes you sit bolt upright; at other times it comes through the voices and actions of other people and we only recognize it later as the hidden hand of God.

If you are walking in the dark at the moment, it does make a difference whether you believe you are alone and life is hostile and meaningless or whether you believe that, in spite of your present experience, God is the Lord, Creator of the ends of the earth and that God, in Jesus Christ, can come to you and lift you up. If you're face down on the floor, it makes a difference if you believe the Lord of the universe says, "Get up, you are healed - there is work for you to do."

The prophet calls us to "wait" for God in the midst of this world where we can feel so lost and overwhelmed. But 'waiting' doesn't mean doing nothing. This is a kind of waiting that is defined by the confidence that God is with us, constantly surrounding us with God's life and love. It is a kind of waiting that is supported by the confidence that God is powerful enough to make things right—if not immediately, then ultimately.

No one knew the difficulties of faith better than the widow of Martin Luther King, Coretta Scott King, who died on the 30th January 2006. She wrote in her 1969 autobiography 'My Life with Martin Luther King Jr.' *"I believe that there is a plan and a purpose for each person's life and that there are forces working in the universe to bring about good and to create a community of love and brotherhood. Those who can attune themselves to these forces - to God's purpose - can become special instruments of his will."*

In this place we rehearse that faith every Sunday. God gives us a tangible sign through the Lord's Supper. Into your hand is placed a piece of bread – a blessed little scrap that miraculously bears all that Jesus was as perfect human being. On our lips we taste the wine of all that Jesus achieved in his living and dying. Just as those little things become part of our physical bodies, so the fruits of Jesus life become part of who we are - God in our bodies, we sharing in all he is.

In this sacrament, the God of domestic things, of homes and meals, lifts us up and assures us that there is nothing that happens to us in which the Creator of the world and the Lord of history will not be with us. **Have you not known? Have you not heard? He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.**

CONCLUSION Just a scrap of bread and a taste of wine against the chaos.

God, help us believe - trust – wait - hope - in you. **Amen.**