

Splendour Of The Lord 8am

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[0 : 00] Our God, we come to you with our hands enfeebled by the times in which we live, lacking the courage to take things in hand.

Our knees are about to buckle under the burdens that we find ourselves confronted with, and our hearts panic and run in every direction.

So as we come to your word this morning, strengthen our hands, confirm our knees, and give peace to our hearts, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. I was on the BC ferries this week.

You've got to remember that I've been reading and working on Isaiah 35 all week, which may be new to you this morning, but it's been with me all week. They usually make very formal announcements on the BC ferries, all according to the script.

[1 : 14] But this time there was a hundred kids with bicycles that had come for a bicycle trip on one of the islands, and they were all over the ship. And so the announcement came on.

Okay, you kids, stop running around. Somebody's going to get hurt. On the basis of reading Isaiah 35, I thought, what he should have said is, Okay, you adults, start running around.

Maybe you'll get healed. In other words, the children should not be conformed to what the adults think is right, but the adults should allow a child to lead them.

Just, that's by way of illustration. This passage is just full of faith. It's what faith is all about.

In our world, which is dry and dusty and secular, and we're involved in the struggle against ignorance and willfulness, this is a wonderful, wonderful chapter.

[2 : 26] It's a very high platform indeed, from which Isaiah has a vision of the ultimate reality of God's purpose in our world, on the basis of which we should live our lives.

Look at it, and you will see. The desert and the dry land will be glad. We tend to reduce our world to desert and dry land, and it's very sad.

It says the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. And this is a reversal of the curse from Genesis chapter 3, where we're told the ground is cursed, and man is reduced to being a slave, embattled in his desire to win his bread from the land, and generation after generation struggling with the earth in order to produce some wealth.

burning the forests of the Amazon, brush fires sweeping through Indonesia, not unrelated, this concept to the fish that are gone from the sea.

That's what we have done as we struggle with the curse that is upon us, because we can't produce in the desert land that we are producing.

[4 : 00] And so it's amazing that it says, Genesis says that man is caught in an endless cycle of moving from dust to dust.

And Isaiah tells about a moving from dust to glory. He says the curse will end, the struggle will be over, the wilderness will be transformed, and the whole thing will burst into blossom.

That's the picture he has for our faith. He describes it in more detail when he talks about Lebanon, which was the long-standing symbol of natural fertility in the land.

And the fertility of Lebanon will come out into the desert. And he talks about Carmel and the ordered cultivation that will become the pattern for the whole of the dry land, the desert and the wilderness.

Carmel is where Jaffa oranges come from, if you want to get a picture of fertility. Sharon was a fertile and beautiful part of the land, and it will be the model after which the desert will be renewed.

[5 : 26] So that what you have is a restoration of the splendor of natural beauty. I'm amazed among people that I know these days that everybody's interested in gardening.

They want to make flowers grow. There's this longing. I don't know if it has any relationship to this, to seeing the splendor of natural beauty overcoming all the elements of a dry land and a desert and dust and winter and wet, that the splendor of the natural beauty will break out.

And the glory of the Lord is experienced in the transforming of nature. The splendor of our God is seen as nature is transformed.

It's an inescapable kind of part of our human experience that you can't see beauty unless you see God beyond it, so that the glory and splendor of nature are inseparable from the ultimate manifestation of the glory of God.

And with that process, the promise is to give us hope. Us whose hands are weak by the invasion into our lives of quiet despair, our hands are to be made strong again.

[7 : 14] And our knees, which are ready to buckle, because of the burdens we bear, they're going to be strengthened so that we will be like Joshua, you see.

Because when Joshua saw the promised land, the Lord said to him, I will be your God. And he said, Be strong and of great courage.

So the Lord says to us to be strong, and he enables us to be strong with the prospect of the promised land before us and the beginnings of the blossoming of the desert.

So then he says, to our fearful and panicking hearts that run in every direction, looking for some hope, some consolation, some peace.

And he brings, if you look at the passage, he says that he brings strength and takes away fear from our hearts.

[8 : 21] And then the transformation of our humanity begins as God comes among us. And the transformation begins by the Lord doing three things.

When he comes, he brings vengeance and divine retribution. What that means is that there is to be, by reason of the presence of God among us, a deep, unmistakable justice that will reach down and touch all of our lives.

There will no longer be any deception. There will no longer be any hiding behind the lie. This deep, penetrating justice will come with the vengeance and divine retribution.

But with it will also come our salvation. And when you want to be alarmed by the unfairness of God bringing vengeance and retribution, remember the way he did it.

He came and stood, well, he stood under man's judgment rather than sitting as the judge who passes judgment on those below him.

[9 : 53] He came in and subjected himself to judgment and by that condemned utterly his judges.

Well, that's what he's going to do. And with that begins the transformation of our human nature.

Something begins to happen to us. And it's spoken of in terms of the eyes of the blind will be opened. We begin to catch a glimpse of a reality we have never seen.

And there is such a thing. Part of our jaundiced, despairing, cynical view of life is because we think we know it all and there's nothing there.

But our eyes need to be opened. And that's what begins to happen. And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.

[10 : 58] We stop for the first time to listen to a message we have never heard. One of the distinguished, ordained graduates of this parish told me this week about preaching an Easter sermon last Easter.

And at the end of it a lady in her 80s came up to her and said, do you know I have never heard that?

And I believe it. And that's the problem with going to church is that you, until your eyes are opened and your ears are unstopped, there may be things you've never seen and things you've never heard.

But this is going to happen, something's going to happen to change that. And then as this happens, so the lame will leap like deer the painful trudging of our life's journey will give way to leaping like a harp.

And the deer on Main Island, they seem to barely touch the ground and they're off again in a great bound. And I think that's the picture that he wants to give here.

[12 : 28] And the muted tongue will shout for joy. All we use our tongues for now is to whisper our anxieties to one another and to try and mumble out our unutterable fears.

Suddenly we are able to shout for joy. That's the transformation of nature then and then the transformation of our humanity. And what is it that brings about this transformation? Well, it's water. It's as water in the wilderness. It gushes forth. And the desert is crisscrossed with streams.

The most desolate places will be turned into marshes teeming with life. All this is going to be, it's water that transforms people.

That's what the Samaritan woman learned when she went and met with Jesus at the well. And Jesus said, anyone who drinks of the water that I shall give you will never thirst again.

[13:50] The transforming water. And Jesus pictures himself as that water from which we are to drink. So that the, this is, the water is the transforming agent for nature and the water is the transforming agent in our lives.

Marked for us by the water of baptism. It's through water that the transformation begins. And the result of this transformation is that there is a highway through the desert.

You know, the desert is, we're familiar with the desert as the place of endless wandering and never arriving.

But suddenly there is through the desert a highway. And this highway is for those who want to make their way back.

The great picture that the New Testament gives us is that the people of Israel were in slavery in Egypt and they wanted to make their way back to the promised land.

[15:12] The people of Israel were in exile in Babylon and they longed to make their way back. The prodigal son was contemplating the pale of pig's will and he wanted to make his way back.

And so there's a highway by which you can come back and it's called the way of holiness. And it's holy because it is God given and the committed pilgrims are there.

The unclean are not going to walk on that. I was reading this. I don't know whether you're interested in this but I had reason to look at this this week and see how it related to this story of the highway.

And it's a prayer that's in the prayer book on page 590 and it's a commendation prayer for somebody who is at the point of death.

And it's graphically direct in talking about the unclean on the highway and how they cannot walk on this highway.

[16:45] And so our prayer for the dying is most merciful savior wash him we pray thee in the blood of the immaculate lamb that was slain to take away the sin of the world that in the midst of this wicked world through the lusts of the flesh or the wiles of Satan being purged and done away he may be presented pure and without spot before thee so that the sinners are washed and made clean they are made holy that they may walk on the way they may walk on the highway well that's the that's what the highway is there for and it's the highway which Jesus picks up and talks about when he says I am the way nobody's going to lose their way on this highway you know the dull and the stupid as we think of ourselves so often and not very not very aggressive but they're not going people like us are not going to lose their way on this highway it will be unmistakable where we are to go and we will know it and so this company of people approach

Mount Zion and there they there they break out into singing if you look in the passage and David read it at the beginning of the service it says the ransomed of the Lord shall return ransomed by the you see because they were slaves and they had to be freed they were in exile and they had to be brought back they were locked into wandering aimlessly in the wilderness and they had to be ransomed and redeemed by one who chose to do it for them and that's one of the really deep words of the whole of scripture that Jesus who is our redeemer is the one who has chosen to liberate us according to the demands of a righteous and holy

God to liberate us from the bondage and enslavement of sin and to redeem us to ransom us from that in order to bring us on the highway to the place he would have us go and so the final picture of this chapter is that the ransomed and redeemed are on the highway which leads to Mount Zion and to the holy mountain and the people enter singing it's a wonderful picture if you look at it closely the ransoms of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing everlasting joy will be upon their heads not the temporary flashes of joy that sometimes happen to us in the course of our daily lives but this is everlasting joy and it says of that joy that they shall obtain joy and gladness it's almost as though trudging along on their way they are overtaken by joy and gladness that this transformation of their lives from a world which is marked by sorrow and sighing we are transformed by being overtaken by joy and gladness as we come to

Mount Zion in Hebrews chapter 12 it tells about the mountains and I think it's important perhaps for you to look at this for a moment but it tells about the mountains in here where it says this about most people you know most people are afraid of the mountains and so that the writer to the Hebrews tells us that you have not come to what may be touched a blazing fire darkness gloom tempest the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further messages be spoken to them for they could not endure the order that was given if even a beast touched the mountain it would be stoned indeed so terrifying was the sight that Moses said I tremble with fear but you have come he writes to Mount Zion to the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem to innumerable angels in festal gathering to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven to a judge who is God of all and to the spirits of just men made perfect and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood the condemning blood of Abel so so that's that's that's why they come with everlasting joy as a crown upon their heads why they are overtaken by gladness and joy and why it is necessary that sorrow and sighing will be gone our lives are marked by sorrow and sighing we have a men's breakfast on

[23 : 07] Wednesday morning and we pray for one another and in order to do that we bring to the attention of one another the sorrows that have entered our lives and the sighing and the longing that have taken over in our lives because our world is marked by sorrow and sighing and we long for the time when sorrow and sighing will be no more and everlasting joy will take over and the hope that belongs to us in Christ will be fulfilled and so we come this morning and bring to this service the sorrowing and the sighing and the separation which is the curse that remains the reality of death amongst us and the process that leads to it we come with that on our hearts and because of that our hands are feeble and our knees are about to buckle and our hearts panic with fear and then we are given the vision of faith which was given by

Isaiah fulfilled in Jesus Christ so that we come as the ransomed of the Lord with singing and everlasting joy we want to be reminded of that we want to take part in that we want to be overtaken by joy and gladness and leave the world of sorrow and sighing behind and that's why our faith in the God who transforms nature who transforms our human lives and who brings us by a highway to the place he would have us be and he in his grace gives us the wonderful desire to be where it is he wants us to be amen hurt well right now we will just next second of all we