

A Restored World!  
Sermon for the 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
Sermon Text: Isaiah 29:17-24



*Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest? <sup>18</sup> In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. <sup>19</sup> The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. <sup>20</sup> For the ruthless shall come to nothing and the scoffer cease, and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off, <sup>21</sup> who by a word make a man out to be an offender, and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right. <sup>22</sup> Therefore thus says the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: “Jacob*

*shall no more be ashamed, no more shall his face grow pale. <sup>23</sup> For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. <sup>24</sup> And those who go astray in spirit will come to understanding, and those who murmur will accept instruction.”*

In recent years, it has become easier to talk about war. Yes, there are even people talking about the necessity of war, people who had previously flat out rejected any kind of war. Lately, billions are being burned to wage war. War is a word. It is a word that deals with numbers, strategies, and world powers. We rarely talk about what war is actually about. Namely, that people are killed. It's about brutal killing and being brutally killed. That's a terrible thought and proof that we don't live in a paradise full of light but in a world full of shadows. We live in a world in which it may actually be necessary to wage war in certain circumstances, even when that would mean that people have to die.

From the book of Isaiah, comes the announcement of a great change. The day is coming when everything will be different. God will bring about this day. On that day, the deaf will hear, the blind will see. The deforested heights of Lebanon are transformed into flourishing gardens and forests. Oppression and war will come to an end. Can this be true? Can there be a new world where cannons remain silent and people who were enemies make peace with one another? Can it be that people change from wanting war to wanting peace? Can it be that the people will gladly follow God's commands? That they want justice instead of injustice? Can it be that our faith becomes simpler, and we don't have to make an effort to invite people to church because these people believe in God already and like going to church? If you look at our modern society, it is hard to believe that something like that could happen. Isn't it more probable that everything just gets worse? It is unlikely that the world will change so radically for the better, considering man's sinful nature.

As a result, something remarkable stands out in the words of the prophet Isaiah: he doesn't demand that his listeners bring about this change themselves. There is nothing to be heard from: “Now is finally the time to begin creating a better world! Save the environment! Honor God, respect your neighbor in his weakness and individuality!” None of that. No imperative, no order, no command. There are other words of the prophet with which he confronts the people with their own responsibility and calls them to repentance. But ironically, when it comes to a major turning point in world history, he doesn't do it. Because man can't bring about a change in world history just as he can't bring about a change in his own heart. That also has an explanation. In the Bible, we know from the beginning that there is a limit where people are always doomed to fail. Even when we are so successful in many areas, we always fail at this point. And it is the point where it's all about our relationship with God. We are deeply sick about this and we can't help ourselves at all. Such a change can only be brought about by God. Isaiah's promise and hope, it must be clearly stated, is based solely on such an intervention by God. Just a little while longer, says the Prophet, then it will be time. But what has become of Isaiah's little while? In the meantime, 3,000 years have flown by and this change still hasn't taken place. A little while? Was that maybe just an empty promise? Can we still use these words of Isaiah today? Can we still say today that it will only take a little while for God to bring the world into order?

Yes, by all means. Because the words of Isaiah give us a different view which goes far beyond the rim of the normal bloody and bleak everyday life. When Isaiah talks about ears and eyes being opened, he's talking precisely about

such a wide view that goes far beyond the present. People who don't have the body parts to hear or see receive these things. The great "Ephphatha" (Mark 7:34)! Be opened is pronounced! And at once, a world is revealed that previously was not visible. What we see there is not some random thing! And it's also not a cure for this or that problem. Nor is it a sudden change in a situation of war. Our sight isn't opened for just anything, but for God Himself. And when our gaze is turned to this God, we see that our world, as it is here and now, is just a small part of a much larger story that God has in store for us. Isaiah wants our eyes to fall on God who planned nothing but good things for our world and for us from the beginning. Behind the here and now is a God who wants our life. It's about the reality of a God who watches over us, especially when everything gets out of control. And how does God bring about such a big change? He does it paradoxically by going right to where the problem is. The problem lies in people. And God becomes a man. God doesn't just become a man, but He also speaks His great Word into the midst of humanity: "Ephphatha!" "Be opened," Jesus said to the blind man. And Jesus didn't say these words to just one blind man, He says the same words to the condition of our humanity. Jesus speaks His words to our ears and hearts so that something opens up and changes. Because Jesus interpreted these very words of the prophet as a reference to His own ministry. He describes His own work as He quotes the words of the prophet: "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them." (Matt. 11:5)

Jesus said this 2,000 years ago. And it was true. The people experienced it. That wasn't an empty promise for a more beautiful future, but reality. There, God was at work. And even if the shadows of the world remained, people could hear the Gospel and they believed. So someone like the apostle Paul could suffer from the circumstances on the one hand, but on the other hand, he had moved past them for a long time now and could say: Nothing can separate us from the love of God. His words and those of the prophet give us hope – here and now. They suggest that we change the direction of our gaze to God: that we hear God's promises and our gaze doesn't remain caught up in complaining, shortcomings, and cruelty; that we see the reality that comes from the invisible, eternal reality into our life here – and is already here.

We call ourselves Christians because we are united with Christ from our baptism. That was already a turning point for us. What's special after this turning point is that we look beyond the horizon in faith in Jesus Christ. And what do we see there? Our faith receives nothing other than God Himself. God's nearness is what moves people and makes them dance with joy. As a result, the problems of our world don't become less, yet they have lost their thorns so that they bounce off of us. We see the reality of our world as it is and we take this reality seriously. But we should take God's reality much more seriously. We therefore see far more than just what the newspapers are full of or what we personally suffer from. Faith sees the light of God and the love that certainly carries through. Darkness loses its dominance, it is only a piece of it, a component that lasts only a short time and then passes away. But God's light lasts forever.

This is not an invitation to lay your hands in your lap, to shrug your shoulders, and to watch indifferently how people ruin everything. We shouldn't passively wait for God's intervention. The fact that Isaiah doesn't demand any kind of action from us here doesn't mean that we don't need to be interested in the hardships of the world. Quite the opposite. We have God's Spirit in our hearts and in this Spirit, we share His interest in the world, in the changes that God brings about: against injustice and destruction – for justice and righteousness, for a life of consideration and acceptance, courage and hope. Where people hear God's Word, He brings about change in their hearts. God's light shines there, brightening the future. He makes us shine as His messengers. Amen.