

Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020

Christ the foretold peace – Isaiah 43:4-13, Ephesians 2:14-18

Talk by Ian Baldwin, Prayers by Julian Providence

Hello, and welcome to our online service. My name is Ian and today we will be thinking about “Christ the foretold peace”. I will be looking at two bible passages, firstly from Isaiah 43 and then Ephesians 2.

Let me pray as we start.

Lord thank you that we can take this time to focus on you. Help us to set aside the business and worries of the week so that we might listen to you and know your peace. Amen.

Now we have the opportunity to say sorry to God for any hurt we’ve done or any unkindness we’ve done and we’re going to do that by saying a confession and you might like to listen to these words and say them in your heart.

### **Confession**

Lord Jesus Christ, we are sorry  
that we have filled the spaces of our hearts  
with our own darkness  
instead of with your light.

We confess  
that we have conformed to this world,  
and not been transformed  
by the renewal of our minds.

Cleanse us and fill us afresh  
with your love and peace.  
We ask this by the power of your Holy Spirit,  
that we might live to your glory and praise.

**Amen.**

And some words from 1 John Chapter 1.

*If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in darkness we lie and we do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin.*

Now Julian is going to lead us in our prayers, and then we will hear God’s word before I speak.

### **Prayers**

Let us pray.

Lord we thank you for the safe birth of Eva to Alex and Andrew. Thank you for bringing her safely into this world. We pray that you would watch over Eva. Protect her, keep her healthy and growing strong. We pray your blessing over Alex and Andrew. Please be near to them in the coming weeks and months as they adapt their lives around this new life that you have given them. Help them to relax and enjoy their new role as parents.

We continue to lift our nation to you regarding the continued coronavirus pandemic. We continue to pray for our government, health chiefs and for those in positions of responsibility for decision-making. Would you continue to guide them, giving them wisdom and foresight to make the right decisions at the right time, particularly as cases are starting to show an upward trend again. Help us as a nation to be thoughtful about how our actions affect others and to follow government guidance.

We pray for those being affected by the social and economic fallout from the pandemic - for those who have lost their jobs or businesses, for those students who are desperately looking for their first job, for school children separated from friends and missing out on education. We think of families under stress, people who are alone and isolated or who are fearful for their health or for the future. We lift to you those for whom the stress and disruption caused by coronavirus has become too great and who are experiencing emotional breakdown.

We lift all these to you Lord, remembering that you are the God who entered this broken world with all its pain and suffering, becoming a light to those in darkness and a hope for all those bowed down under the burdens of life.

Thank you, God of love and compassion, that you have not abandoned us but through your Spirit and your church you are very present in this world. Please help us as your church at St John's and your church in this nation to become a place of refuge and peace, strength and restoration and that Lord out of this darkness you would bring people into your light so that they can see You, the one who gives true meaning to all our lives.

As we begin to open St John's for prayer this coming Thursday, we pray over our building. We ask that you will be present here and that those who come in, whether from our church family or from the community, would encounter you Lord. Holy Spirit would you use this time for those of us who can come, to speak to us about where you are leading St John's and your purposes for us. Open our hearts and our spiritual eyes to see your vision and give us a sense of anticipation of all that you will do through your body here.

Help us to prepare well for this opening and we pray now for your protection over the building, the church family who are able to come to open the building and over all who come in.

Thinking of our future we continue to pray for our church leader. Please help them to prepare to come to us, even if they do not yet know you are bringing them to St John's. We pray that when they hear, they will answer your call.

We continue to give you our thanks for how you have sustained and provided for us over the months. Let us remember from this that you are faithful and that though we might be small in number, that you are with us. We thank you for those who have taken on leadership - Steve and Ian and Sue - and for all those who are continuing to support our weekly services, whether through contributing or simply by being here.

We remember CAP and all the great work they have continued throughout this pandemic Lord. Continue to give them your strength and help them to be able to rest from their work over this coming month. Prompt us to pray for those in need on the CAP email sent to us.

We lift those of our own church family to you who are more in need at this time. We remember those who have lost family and friends - Yvette, Emma, Margaret and Tom. We pray for Alison's sister that you would give her your peace, for Françoise and Margaret's daughter Jenny looking for teaching jobs next month, for Betty that she will be offered cataract surgery soon and for Val Beckway as she continues to heal.

We also pray for our family members who we have not seen. Please be with them and bring them to our attention if they are in need.

Lord you know and love each and every one of us so much. Wherever we are this morning Lord, would you come to meet us in that place. Speak to us and let us dwell in your healing and restoring presence.

Let's end with the prayer Jesus taught us:

***Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name.***

***Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as in heaven.***

***Give us today our daily bread.***

***Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.***

***Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.***

***For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever.***

***Amen.***

Our first reading is in Isaiah 43 verses 4 to 13

### **Isaiah 43 4-13**

*"Since you are precious and honoured in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf. All the nations gather together and the peoples assemble. Which of their gods foretold this and proclaimed to us the former things? Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right, so that others may hear and say, "It is true." "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no saviour. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed — I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "that I am God. Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?"*

Our second reading is from Ephesians 2 verses 14 to 18

### **Ephesians 2 14-18**

*"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit."*

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God.

### **"Christ the foretold peace"**

We live in troubled times and things which seemed so sure are now uncertain. This can give rise to doubts and fears. These in turn can make us guarded. In protecting our way or thinking it is the only way we can then go on to look down on others or to make snap judgements on others, excluding them out of fear or because they are different. You see how quickly differences can become barriers and how prejudices and animosity can arise. Is it any wonder that we find it hard to find peace?

We must guard ourselves against spiritual pride that blinds ourselves to our own faults and highlights others' faults. Glorifying in ourselves rather than bringing glory to God.

Israel finds itself in a tough place – they had failed to be God’s people in so many ways. In our reading from Is. 43 we find God reminding his people who they are. In v1-7 God says, “Fear not for I am with you in all the dangers you face because you are mine”. Only Yahweh – the living God – is their saviour. Israel is precious to him. God is willing to give so much – lands and nations – for them. He promises to gather his people together from the four corners of the earth. Why? - because in v4 Israel is precious to God, honoured in His sight and loved by Him.

In v8-13 God demonstrates all this by summoning all peoples to be witnesses like a court case of Jehovah v Israel and the little gods. God wants his people to be at peace with Him and their neighbours. The first comment in v8 is that the witnesses are blind and deaf! Not a very promising start but this means spiritually not physically.

The three parties are in:           v9 the nations or the world  
  v10 Israel his chosen people  
  v11 God himself

In v5-7 it is the people of God that are gathered. Now in v9 the nations gather, and they are asked to prove that their gods knew or foretold what would happen? Can their gods, made from wood, stone and metal answer for themselves?

Now in V10 God turns to Israel as witnesses. They were created by God and chosen by him as his people to be a light to the nations. God says to them you know me the great “I AM” other gods come and go, are popular or supplanted by other gods but Yahweh was, and is and is to come I AM.

Nothing and no-one can stand in God’s way. He is the only saviour, and he has revealed this, saved them, and proclaimed this in advance. God will be not only be their saviour but through his son Jesus be all peoples’ saviour and only he can bring that promised peace. This is what Paul explains in Ephesians 2. That Jesus is the saviour sent by God to bring the foretold peace.

Israel was supposed to be a light to the nations an example of a nation under God. However, Israel had come to think of itself as God’s favourite and superior to others. It looked down on gentiles. Indeed, they hated other nations and though gentiles or non-Jews were just fodder for hell. Contact with gentiles was limited to business. For a Jew to marry a gentile meant alienation from your family. In fact, they declared you dead and held your funeral!

This division was shown most clearly in the temple. There were areas called courts for the priest, for men and for women and this was surrounded by a thick wall. The wall separated the parts for Jews from the outer court of the gentiles which was at a lower level. On this wall was written in several languages “No foreigner may enter within the barrier and enclosure round the temple. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.” Not very welcoming!

This is the background Paul is addressing in Eph 2.

So, the gentiles are separated from God by their sin but also in hostilities with the Jews which often boiled over into violence.

In Eph. 2v14 Jesus by his blood shed on the cross has broken down the wall – that barrier of hostility – and we can now have peace with God and between Jew and gentile.

At the time of Jesus, the actual temple wall in Jerusalem was still standing but what it represented was destroyed. It was not until AD70 that Rome destroyed the temple.

So how did Jesus break down this barrier? Firstly, writes Paul in v15a, Jesus “abolished in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations”. Yet Jesus said in Matt 5v17 “Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them”. So what is the difference?

Jesus was meaning that as his followers we should live by the actual 10 commandments (the moral law) which is a radical lifestyle, a righteous way of life that makes a big difference to how we think about people and treat others. The Pharisees though that obeying every little rule and regulation made them righteous but it is only by faith in Jesus.

Paul means that all the ceremonial law like circumcision, sacrifices, certain foods, washing etc. etc. and that Jesus fulfilled all ceremonial law by his death on the cross. The moral law remains as a code of behaviour and living but it is not a means to our salvation. It doesn't bring peace with God. Otherwise, as we can never fully obey the law, we can never be at peace with God and are therefore still separated from God. Jesus paid the price for our sin, that is the wrong we do. He took it upon himself freeing us from the bondage and slavery to sin and bringing peace.

God's acceptance of us whether Jew or gentile is by faith in Jesus Christ. The barrier is gone and we can be united. That is the power of the cross.

In v15b Jesus having abolished the divisive law replaces it with a united humanity. Now the barrier is gone there is nothing to keep Jew and gentile apart except their own self will and pride. Jesus has created something new in that Jew and gentile can unite by faith in the person of Jesus and become new Christians. It is only through a personal union with Jesus that it is possible to have peace with God. This crossing of the divide between Jew and gentile goes further.

Listen to what Paul writes in Gal 3v26-28 “You are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female for all are one in Christ Jesus.”

This does not mean that these groups do not exist but rather they are all equal before God created in his image and because of their unity in Christ. This knowledge should change how we view others irrespective of their race, gender or social status.

Paul states in v16 that in order to have unity and peace there must be an end to hostility. Jew and gentile are reconciled bringing peace and crucially there must be reconciliation between God and humanity.

Our rebellion against God and God's wrath against our sinful nature were both ended by Christ's death on the cross. This new humanity is united in Christ and this united humanity is united with God our creator. It does not mean everything is perfect, only that the potential is there for those who seek Jesus.

Paul continues in v17 that Jesus came with a message of peace. In v14 Paul says Jesus himself is our peace and in v15 by his death he made peace. Jesus' message continues to those near (the Jews) and those far off (the gentiles, that's us). Jesus gave his peace and his commission to the disciples and it has been passed down the generations to us. Christ speaks through his people – like you and me – by the power of the Holy Spirit to this current generation. The unity and peace happens as people accept the gospel. There were, and are problems with God's people and that's why Paul addresses them in his letters.

v18 So now that the peace and reconciliation has happened there has to be an ongoing relationship which requires access. The access Paul writes of is like us being granted a royal audience and being presented once to the Queen. However, it is much more in that we have the strength, courage and confidence in Christ to approach God's throne grace at any time. It is an open invitation because of Jesus.

We may not have a big wall round the church but our society is not short of barriers like race, colour, gender, education, wealth, job, religion so we are not so very different from the Ephesians.

So let us seek God's foretold peace won by and found only in Jesus Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to break down those barriers in our church and in society as we live out the gospel of Jesus.

Amen

Thank you for taking this time to be with us. We hope you have experienced the peace of God during this service. Let's end with a prayer.

Lord God, we thank you for sending Jesus to be our peace.

May we seek to live by the power of your Holy Spirit in peace with one another and our neighbours that we might bring glory to your name, now and forever. Amen.