Prayer is God, Christ and the Spirit at work through us

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Pentecost 23 C – Remembrance Sunday – Isa 65 17-25, Isa 12 1-6, 2 Thess 3 7-12, Lk 21 5-19

Kids: We're just about to hear some words from the prophet, Isaiah. He's speaking to people who've had a terrible time – so terrible that you could hear weeping all over their city. (Weeping is the sort of crying that means you can't do anything but cry. And when it stops, you're so exhausted, you can't do anything except sleep).

But Isaiah's telling the people about a dream God's given him – a dream that everything will be new and good again; so good there won't *be* weeping any more.

God gave them a dream. What happens when *you* dream? Do you wake up and find your dream's really happened? What do you think happens with God's dreams? I think they happen – maybe not straight away, but I'm pretty sure God's dreams happen.

Isaiah wanted people to dream God's dream – to dream what God was dreaming. People who know how it feels to weep and weep have always understood what Isaiah means, and they've made songs so sad people can dream God's dreams and give each other some hope. Here's one of those songs – special today on Remembrance Sunday

Peace / love / joy is flowing like a river, flowing out through you and me; spreading out into the desert; setting all the captives free.

We might not see God's dream happen straight away, but maybe some people who weep will hear us singing God's dream for

them. And that might just help.

And now it's time for us to hear the readings.

Sermon: In Isaiah 65 this morning we heard glorious promises—new heavens and new Earth, gladness and rejoicing for ever, delight – and '*the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind*.' Isaiah lists those former things that definitely won't be in this glorious future. No more weeping or cries of distress or infant deaths; no more lives cut short. Poor people will no longer farm and build only to see the fruit of their work fall into other hands. People won't work in vain any more. Their children won't be born into a world where they lack prospects of good health or happiness. People won't live in a world where they think God doesn't hear them; doesn't answer the prayers.

Why could they think like that? For people of Isaiah's time, the future could seem pretty bleak. They lived in a little country which kept on being invaded by powerful armies. Both their ancient ancestors and their more recent ones had been slaves in foreign countries. They were near the bottom of the world's pecking order. And yet, Isaiah, in our first reading, gave them a dream of a beautiful new future. And in Isaiah's song, which we had as today's Psalm, we heard that their vision for this beautiful future was not just for themselves, but for all the other nations as well.

Faith like that is a gift from God. It's generous; outward looking; courageous and realistic. It's not as though these people were oblivious to the mistreatment and injustices they suffered. It's not as if they were oblivious to the pain of brief lives and premature deaths. They knew all about these things. But the gift of faith that God gave them set their hearts free to hope courageously and with outward generosity. Their hearts were set free to look to a future God held out to them and the whole cosmos.

This is the divinely-inspired realism, courage and generosity we heard Jesus call from his disciples today as he neared the end of his earthly ministry. It's what he calls from *us* today in the ambiguity of our prayers for peace on Remembrance Sunday in a world where many on-going conflicts still poison millions of lives.

We might think that our prayers on this Remembrance Sunday are pretty feeble and ineffective. But Sister Maria Boulding writes about the significance of our listening to God through prayer in spite of such misgivings. She writes, '*Your silent listening through prayer, through people and through events will be very personal; it may seem very solitary, but it is not. You are the answering readiness, the receptivity, without which even today God cannot give as he longs to give. Our noisy busy world has little time to listen and wait and – what is worse – it is starved of hope. So many hopes disappoint, and people are afraid of being disappointed yet again. It is when we reach the brink of despair that hope grounded in God has a chance, because there is nothing else left. The modern world can surely not be far from the brink. In the name of many other people, you can listen to the word that tells you you are unconditionally loved.*' *The Coming of God* p. 7

Cultivating this habit of listening helps us hear what Jesus tells us – his disciples – today. When we find ourselves up against seemingly impossible odds; when we know it will be very dangerous to express the values of justice, mercy, love and faith that he's taught us, we won't waste our strength planning our defensive strategies. If we've practised the 'silent listening prayer' that Sr Maria has described, then Christ's words will come to us. We'll speak words – we'll embody a wisdom – that will silence voices of violence and conflict, the voices of greed and persecution; the voice of war will be silenced.

This Remembrance Sunday is a call to such prayer. Isaiah gives

us a vision of what to pray for. And Jesus tells us that the power of prayer is the gift of prayer. We must recognise that it’s not our strength that means prayer is effective or not. Prayer is God at work; Christ at work; the Spirit at work through us.

When we receive that gift, all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well. And for that, we give God thanks and praise! Amen.