

There are two things going on this morning that are worth noticing. They are things that are on my mind, which is why I choose these particular lessons.

The first, according to Isaiah (and countless others) is a reminder that God has big things planned; bigger than our imaginations can conceive. God's plans cross borders and eliminate boundaries. God's plans cut across our personal feelings - our greed - our sense of belonging. God's plans include all peoples; all nations.

These ideas are harder to understand because even Isaiah puts the vision in terms that he knows best. The meeting place will be his home turf. The framework for freedom begins and ends in Judah's capital city. Yet the promise is global - universal even.

That brings the question of faith to the forefront. Such visions belong to people of faith. You must have a certain mindset to trust in this vision- you have to be built a certain way to believe all this, and it's possible that there are different 'levels' of belief. That notion comes in the form of a plea from the disciples "Lord - increase our faith!" We've all come to the conclusion (at one time or another) that faith is something we can measure. And like anything good that we can weigh, count, or otherwise accumulate, more is better.

So in the case of God's promise, we've convinced ourselves down the years that the more we believe in that peace that passes understanding, the more likely we are to experience it - understand it - enjoy it for ourselves.

Of course, God's promises don't work like that.

Faith is something different. A gift that finds us, rather than an object waiting to be found. Faith is part trust, part belief, and part acceptance. We talk of putting our faith in people and things - heroes, employees, institutions, ideas - as though it is our faith that makes these things worthy, But faith isn't something we control - and it is not our gift to give.

“If you had faith the size of a mustard seed...” Jesus says “trees would replant themselves at your command’. That’s an interesting idea, but it is really just Jesus telling us we’ve no idea about the true nature of faith.

Faith is not a commodity that needs to be accumulated. Faith is a way of seeing that lets us appreciate the reality of God.

Which brings me back to Isaiah. One of many biblical prophets who insists - against the present evidence - that good things are coming, and that God is behind them. By faith the prophet accepts that God’s promise of peace is not just for a small select group. Nations shall stream to the mountain of God. Swords and spears will be traded for more useful implements. The idea of war will be unlearned and the practice of peace will be adopted.

In the turmoil of his time - and in today’s climate of mistrust - Isaiah’s words are just idealistic nonsense.

But through the lens of faith, the language of promise becomes a hopeful, daring proposition. In light of faith even the size of a mustard seed, Jesus’ death sentence became a new lease on life. God’s prophets live in a world where anything is possible and where the best, most hopeful things are within our grasp.

We are reminded of that whenever we come together in worship. The promise is made real every time we share bread and wine around this table. Our faith doesn’t make this meal sacred. Faith lets us see God work in this otherwise ordinary event. Faith moves mountains so we can see the horizon. Faith replants trees so that we can see where God waits for us. And this ‘faith’ is not our doing (as the apostle reminds us) it is a gift from God.