

5th Sunday after Trinity 2020

*As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

¹² You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

*¹³ Instead of the thorn-bush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure for ever.'
(Isaiah 55:10-13)*

Restrictions are easing. Over the next few months we hope to be returning to normality. Not normality as we knew it six months ago, but at least a normality where we can once again meet with family and friends face to face. There are mixed feelings about it. Some people, as we've seen from the news coverage are just raring to go, first to beaches and then to pubs.

Churches are opening more slowly. Observing government guidance while bearing in mind the complexity of the architecture and the possible vulnerability of a mainly elderly congregation demands a great deal of thought. It's a challenge for our wardens and will be continue to be for our new vicar. It may feel frustrating that we can't just rush back into worship but we have to be patient, after all the virus has clearly not gone away.

It must have felt even more frustrating for the people for whom this prophecy of Isaiah was directed. We've been deprived of our place of worship for around just over four months. The people of Israel would have been exiled from Jerusalem and the temple for getting on for forty years when they were given this prophecy. Any plans they might have for being restored to their homeland just didn't seem to be happening. But in this passage we hear them being told that God hadn't forgotten his promise that they should return. They just needed to be patient and trust in his word.

Through the prophet, God was letting the people of Israel know that his plans would be accomplished even though they weren't able to see any sign of it at the time. They might formulate plans but in the end it would be God who would enable them to return, and what a return it would then be. If they listened to God they'd be able to come back to a place where their faith could flourish and grow. When God brought them home then they'd really be able to celebrate.

So as we wait for our return to church let's keep this prophecy in mind. God will bring us back to our place of worship when the time is right. We may not be able to have the celebrations that we'd been hoping for, no singing for one thing, but we can go out with joy into the future. The restrictions of Covid-19 will diminish. The renewal of our church life will come about and, with trust in God's word, we'll return with gladness to fulfil his purpose for the church in our parish.
Amen