

Oaks of Righteousness

READ ISAIAH 61:1-3

When Jesus began his ministry on earth he used these verses from Isaiah 61 to describe his mission.

He said, I have come:

- To preach good news to the poor
- To bind up the broken-hearted
- To proclaim freedom for the captives
- And release from darkness for the prisoners

Because of the mission of Jesus, his death and resurrection, we have...

1. A crown of beauty instead of ashes

2 weeks ago we wrote our *confessions before the cross*. The wrong things in our lives – the sins, the selfishness that make us sad and sorry...and because Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, because he was made sin for us so that we may be clean and holy before God – we burnt all those pieces of paper – and made ashes.

In the Old Testament times people used to wear ashes when they felt sad and sorrowful! They would wear rough clothes and put ashes on their heads!

Because Jesus died on the cross for us, and because God declared that he accepted his sacrifice by raising Jesus from the dead – we don't have to wear ashes on our heads! No, we need to confess our sins and bring them to the cross; and when we trust in Jesus death for us, then we are made children of the KING. Instead of ashes we are given a crown!

Because of the mission of Jesus, his death and resurrection, we have...

2. The oil of gladness instead of mourning

2 weeks ago we wrote *our hurts on pieces of white paper and we pinned them to the cross*, reminding ourselves that Jesus died on the cross so that we may be healed of our hurts and the wounds that we receive in life, **“By his wounds we are healed.”**

When Jesus appeared to his disciples on that first resurrection day he showed them his hands and his feet, and the hole in his side – Jesus bears the scars of his suffering in his risen resurrected body – he is our wounded healer, **“By his wounds we are healed”**. That is how the cross – a symbol of torture and death, has become a sign of life, hope and healing – because Jesus rose again on Easter Day – *and that is why we have put a white and gold cloak of victory on the cross today!*

= When we bring the hurts and painful experiences we encounter in life to the cross – *and find his help to leave them there* – then God can take even these experiences and use them for his glory by using us in our woundedness to bring healing to others. Inside this glass pot is a part of every piece of white paper that was pinned to the cross 2 weeks ago – instead of mourning over of our hurts, they have become the means of healing to others. Because of his death for us we are healed; because of his risen life we are redeemed – there is redemption for all of our life experiences! The oil (healing) of gladness instead of mourning.

Because of the mission of Jesus, his death and resurrection, we have...

3. The garment of praise instead of the spirit of despair

2 weeks ago we wrote on coloured papers *our thanksgiving for the cross* – because Jesus died and rose again for us, the WAY has been made for us to be rescued; to have forgiveness of sins; to become children of God.

- God's people are people of praise!
- Because of Easter Day instead of hopelessness and despair, we have hope! Hope for today and hope for tomorrow!
- Instead of despair God dresses us in a garment of praise!

*Wearing smart clothes, pretty clothes. Easter used to be known as a time for wearing beautiful hats! **How many people are wearing the garment of praise this afternoon?** Seen in the eyes / face / smile / body.*

Praise is the most decentering element of prayer. When we praise we look away from ourselves to God! Jesus calls us to take up our cross – to lose our lives in order to find LIFE. So when we praise God for the cross, it is a double blow to our egos! ...& therefore something we should always do.

Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus we have been given a garment of praise to wear instead of a spirit of despair!

Because of the mission of Jesus, his death and resurrection, we are called...

4. Oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, for the display of the LORD's splendour

Right here and now the crown of righteousness, the oil of gladness and the garment of praise have become a tree – and that is what this verse calls us:

***we are oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD,
for the display of his splendour!***

When we have:

- A crown of righteousness – *instead of ashes*
- The oil of gladness - *instead of mourning*
- The garment of praise - *instead of the spirit of despair*

- *Then we are like Oak trees: strong, secure, majestic, enduring.*

[The oak has always been seen as the national tree of England. Its great height, age and strength made it the king of the English forest, and a symbol of endurance. *There's an oak tree in Sherwood forest (of Robin Hood fame) which is 1000 years old – it's 35' round at the base and 52' high*]

- *And what we stand for is RIGHTEOUSNESS.*
- *We have been made HOLY – to display the splendour of GOD!*

All this through JESUS, who came on a mission:

- To preach good news to the poor
- To bind up the broken-hearted
- To proclaim freedom for the captives
- And release from darkness for the prisoners

He died on a cross for us and was declared to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead and he lives in heaven as our risen Saviour. Alleluia!